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LORD FISHER

CAPTAIN JOHN FISHER, C.B., R.N.
Captain of H.M.S. *Excellent*, 1883

Frontispiece, I

THE LIFE OF LORD FISHER OF KILVERSTONE

ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET

O.M., G.C.B., G.C.V.O., LL.D.

BY

ADMIRAL SIR R. H. BACON

K.C.B., K.C.V.O., D.S.O.

IN TWO VOLUMES VOLUME ONE

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FOREWORD

LORD FISHER of Kilverstone was a great man; in fact, history will probably record that he was the most remarkable Englishman that this century has so far seen. In the face of the most formidable opposition, and in spite of being largely unsupported by our politicians, he effected the complete reorganization and rebuilding of the British Navy, and thus gave to the country, on the eve of the Great War, a weapon which ensured the safety of our Empire. Throughout the whole of his service career he never made a mistake so far as the Navy was concerned. His time in the junior grades of the service was in all respects, and beyond the usual, distinguished. In the higher branches his career was remarkable for a disregard of conventions and the introduction of innovations. He instituted reforms for the well-being of the officers and men which were long over-due; and, by the purging of the Navy of useless ships, he was able to introduce a system whereby each fighting ship in reserve had the important portion of her crew living on board, and accustomed to her and to the particularities of their work. By this master-stroke of organization the whole of the Reserve Navy was brought practically in line with the efficiency of the ships in full commission—a feat ever before considered impossible, and one without parallel in the other navies of the world.

But the greatest of all his achievements was the

JAN 27 1934

introduction of the long-range fighting battleship without sacrificing our numerical supremacy in ships of the new design over that of other countries. In 1903 he saw, with that extraordinary foresight which was one of his great gifts, that battles could, and would, be fought at ranges two and three times as great as those which were then considered feasible; and that unless we took the lead, some other country inevitably would do so, in which case we should find ourselves hopelessly left behind. He appreciated that the longer range of battle demanded a ship of a type totally different from that then in the Navy. Although, in 1901, he had stated his convictions, based on the gunnery of the time, that our battleships should have as major armament the *smallest* large gun, and, as auxiliary thereto, the *largest* small gun, two years later, with the evidence before him gained from the long-range trials, he had no hesitation in changing completely round and insisting on having a major armament of the *largest* large gun and the minor armament of (within reason) the *smallest* small gun. The manner in which he introduced this vast change in design of ship, from what it was in 1904 to one of a uniform large-gun armament in 1906, and started the rebuilding of our Navy in accordance with modern requirements without jeopardizing our sea supremacy, and in the face of most vicious and virulent opposition, is told later on; but the success of the achievement stamps Lord Fisher as a statesman gifted with foresight, energy, and indomitable courage. It is a matter for congratulation that the change came into being during the time that Lord Fisher held office at the Admiralty, otherwise disaster might well have befallen us in the aftermath that was bound to follow

the revolution in naval warfare which was brought about by long-range battle fighting.

It might be expected that the Government of the day would have welcomed the assistance of Lord Fisher in this work of naval reorganization; but this was not so. As early as 1905 he was driven to write a letter of resignation to the Prime Minister of the day, which only the advice of King Edward prevented him from forwarding. It was at a moment when he had the chance of becoming the head of the largest engineering works of the country at a salary of £10,000 a year; yet, at the instance of the King, he remained at a salary of £2,600 a year to serve his country, only, in the end, to be deserted and betrayed by our politicians. The sorriest part of the story of Lord Fisher's life is the lurid light which it sheds on the shortcomings of our form of Government. At every important turn in Lord Fisher's official life he was crossed by politicians, and often by the House of Commons; his administrative career was one long fight against opposition and intrigue. This in peace-time might be condoned; but, as we shall see, at no time did the country suffer more from governmental errors than during the war.

Let us mention a few of Lord Fisher's more important official battles. When he was Controller of the Navy, he introduced the water-tube boiler. The House of Commons, entirely ignorant of ships, their engines and boilers, under the threat of an adverse vote, forced on the First Lord and the Government a Committee of Investigation which wasted for the country a large sum of money, saddled the Navy with eighteen ships of reduced value, and for some time made our Navy inferior in general steaming efficiency

to that of France, then our principal potential enemy.

In 1894 the Board of Admiralty, of which Sir John Fisher was a member, had to threaten to resign in order to force the Government of the day to make adequate provision of ships.

In 1909 certain of the younger and more inexperienced members of the Cabinet did not hesitate to assume that their small knowledge of naval requirements was superior to that possessed by the Admiralty, and imperilled the existence of the Empire by persuading the Cabinet to refuse to confirm the programme of capital ships that the Admiralty considered necessary. This led Mr. McKenna to send in his resignation ; which, had it been accepted, would have been followed by that of the Sea Lords, headed by Sir John Fisher. It was entirely owing to the strong patriotic action taken by Sir Edward Grey that Mr. Churchill and his colleagues were vanquished, and the Admiralty programme accepted. This story makes sorry reading, especially as, for a day or two, the fate of the Empire hung in the balance.

Following on this, the Prime Minister, after refusing to grasp the nettle firmly and to deal suitably with Lord Charles Beresford and his lapses in discipline, found himself obliged to hold an inquiry into the charges which the latter brought against the Admiralty. A more miserable business it is not easy to conceive ; for, out of pure " Let slide " and a fear of a threatened semi-political campaign, an unsubmissive subordinate was allowed to arraign the Admiralty—a thing that had never happened before, and, please God, will never be allowed to happen again. The report of the Committee of Investigation is dealt with later ; but everyone who

has had the opportunity of reading the minutes of the Cabinet Committee must agree with Lord Fisher's strong condemnation of that report. The net result was that, because of sheer fright on the part of the Government and a misjudged view of expediency, the Admiralty were deserted and their authority in the Navy seriously undermined. The re-echo of this miserable action on the part of the Government is to be heard in the *Royal Oak* affair of late years.

This, surely, was bad enough, but what can be said of our system of governing our Navy (for it is the system, not the individuals, that we are arraigning) which permitted Mr. Churchill, a young self-confident politician, while at the Admiralty as First Lord, to cause two of the most experienced First Sea Lords this country has ever seen to leave office through disagreements with his views on technical matters in which he had no experience; and allowed him to rid himself of a third in what Mr. Bonar Law in the House of Commons designated as a "brutal manner"? This system accorded to this political stripling power to override the opinion of technical officers of double his age and ten times his experience. That this should have been possible during this century is all the more remarkable when we consider that not a single First Sea Lord in the last one hundred years, and probably never before in the history of our Navy, has left the Admiralty owing to the First Lord of the Admiralty having had the assurance to override his considered technical opinion.

Yet these things happened in the last years that preceded the war, and even actually during the war itself.

The Navy was, and still is, the main security of the nation. Its ruling and ordering should have been

conducted, as up to then had been the case, with the sobriety and consideration that so important a national safeguard demands, and should not have been turned over to the mercy of a headstrong political novice.

Let us probe the political question further. By our system of politics, any man who may happen to be Prime Minister when war breaks out is considered to be the fit and proper person to carry out the supreme superintendence of the war and, *ex officio*, to preside over the War Council, notwithstanding the fact that the qualities of the leader of a political party in peace-time are diametrically opposed to those required by the Chairman of that Council in war-time. An eloquent speaker, a master of Parliamentary tactics, a ready fencer in debate, a man practised in the application of expediency to the affairs of the moment, a slippery avoidance of dealing with issues which threaten to be unpleasant—these are some of the attributes of a good party leader; and it would be ruination to any political party to be led by a man who was downright, and allowed no matter, however unpleasant, to be shelved or shirked. Yet these latter are some of the qualities demanded of the Chairman of a War Council. The result was that Mr. Asquith, undoubtedly a great party Prime Minister, was, by his life's training, utterly incompetent to preside over the War Council. A fine scholar, an excellent debater, a clever lawyer with a well-balanced mind; but these very attributes damned his capacity as a chairman of a committee where action and probing to the root of every question were absolutely essential, and where speed of judgment, fixity of purpose, and courage were of the greatest moment.

We take immense pains to train our Generals and

Admirals in the art of fighting. To see this we have only to glance at the service careers of Lord French, Earl Haig, or Earl Jellicoe; and further to read, as set forth later on in this book, the way in which Lord Fisher selected the last-named officer four years before the war, and insisted on his being given certain appointments, in order that he should be trained and fit to command our Fleet in war. But, in peace-time no thought was ever given to the organization of the Government of the country for war; when peace administration would have to march side by side with momentous strategical decisions. The peace politician was suddenly, and without previous special thought or training, called on to conduct a war of titanic proportions and bewildering technical intricacy. The result was inefficient working of the administrative machine, which led to disaster.

To Lord Fisher, that man of sure judgment, uncanny foresight, minute attention to detail, and instant action, the War Council meetings were wormwood and gall. He had to sit, silent, chafing and inwardly fuming, and listen to a committee of amateurs, presided over by a man quite unsuited to the post, dallying with the prosecution of the war. No propositions were surveyed with Lord Fisher's idea of thoroughness. A superficial talk, when non-experts aired their opinions, and then—adjournment. He wrote at the time: " . . . the War Council assembles next Thursday, and I suppose it will be like a game of ninepins. Everyone will have a plan, and one ninepin in falling will knock over its neighbour." No wonder that he asked the Prime Minister to relieve him from further attendance at the meetings. He saw so clearly what might have been done, what should have been done;

but never was there any definite thing done. We merely drifted, drifted, drifted into the Dardanelles entanglement.

Everyone must own that the ordering of the Admiralty in War is a matter of the greatest importance to the country. But the men who held the appointment of First Lord were never chosen with any idea of their fitness in relation to the other members of the Board; politics alone governed the selection of men for this office.

Who is the more important person to the Navy and the country in a war, the First Lord of the Admiralty or the First Sea Lord? Without the slightest doubt it is the First Sea Lord. The First Lord, being a civilian, is chiefly valuable in war-time to represent the Navy in the Cabinet, and to explain, so far as secrecy may permit, the policy of the Admiralty for the benefit of members of the House of Commons; but when at the Admiralty, without in any way relinquishing his position of *facile princeps*, he should be careful not to allow his necessarily superficial opinions on technical naval subjects to override those of the Sea Lords.

The selection of politicians for office of First Lord in war-time should be governed mainly by a desire to choose men who would be likely to be *en rapport* with the First Sea Lord, and to supplement any temperamental deficiencies that he may have. This was never sufficiently considered. Political considerations, especially when the Coalition Government was formed, were paramount. At that time a certain number of posts in the Cabinet had to be allotted to the Unionists, the leading Unionists had to be provided for—it was part of the bargain; the Liberals were anxious not to yield more than was

necessary; so, both the square and round pegs, Liberals and Unionists, were pushed into holes regardless of their fit, largely to satisfy party *amour-propre.*

Let us examine critically the various Admiralty combinations that were thrown together during the war.

First came Mr. Churchill and Prince Louis of Battenberg. The latter was a sick man. This came to utter grief, and Lord Fisher had to be called in to put matters right. This brought Mr. Churchill and Lord Fisher together—two autocrats. Mr. Churchill, with undue egotism, convinced that he knew better than any First Sea Lord what was best for the Navy; and Lord Fisher, with pardonable sincerity, convinced that he, and not Mr. Churchill, had this knowledge. Their association ended in explosion and disaster.

Then came Mr. Balfour and Sir Henry Jackson: the philosopher wedded to the scientist. The outcome was from the start assured. Speed of action waited on cautious conviction. The temperament of superintellectuals leads to inaction rather than to action; the fiery energy that drove the Admiralty during the previous six months suddenly vanished, and was succeeded by a period of sound, but lethargic, administration. The nation grumbled, and another combination was tried. This time Sir John Jellicoe and Sir Edward Carson, both sound men; but both of rather a pessimistic temperament. There was none of the fiery optimism of Lord Fisher about Admiral Jellicoe. He viewed things from the sober standpoint, which, it must be confessed, was at that time rather a cheerless one; and his First Lord was temperamentally the exact opposite to Mark Tapley.

Sir Eric Geddes and Sir Rosslyn Wemyss completed

the list. But the war was then practically over, and these two had the benefit of reaping the results of Sir John Jellicoe's energetic dispositions.

Had a reshuffle been possible, say Mr. Churchill and Sir Henry Jackson, Mr. Balfour and Lord Jellicoe, or Sir Edward Carson and Lord Fisher, then any one of these combinations would have been a greater success than any of the administrations that had being during the war.

But the real tragedy lies in the fact that all the time there lay close at hand the ideal combination of Mr. McKenna and Lord Fisher. No man could guide and restrain Lord Fisher so well as his old chief. No man knew better Admiralty practice, or better appreciated the functions of the First Lord than Mr. McKenna. The combination of Lord Fisher's genius and Mr. McKenna's sound sense would have been of tremendous value to the nation. There were at least half a dozen sound financiers who could have looked after the nation's finances—but no! Four Cabinet seats had to be found for the Unionists; the Exchequer was too important a post for the Liberals to cede. Mr. Balfour, as an ex-Prime Minister, had to be suitably provided for: where was he to go? The Admiralty was evidently a post of sufficient importance for him to occupy. So to the Admiralty he went. Thus, in those critical days of dire import to the death-struggle of the Empire, national exigency was studied less than political expediency, and party politics affected adversely the efficient management of our naval forces.

A wide field of speculation is opened up when we consider what the changes in our world-strategy might have been if, at the commencement of the war, the

Chairman of the War Council had been a man of business ability, energy, and courage; if, instead of no single war plan, of the several that were brought forward, being critically considered in the light of "means available,"[1] full and well-considered appreciations of all proposals had been prepared by the Naval Staff, and the General Staff at the War Office. Further, if these had been read and expounded to the War Council by the First Sea Lord and the Chief of the General Staff, instead of, merely, Lord Kitchener and Mr. Churchill being permitted to express their personal views; then, one thing is certain—the abortive Dardanelles campaign would never have resulted. It is more than probable that the Belgian coast would have been wrested from the Germans early in the war, their submarine-boat campaign materially curtailed, naval and military strategy brought into line, and probably the war shortened considerably.

Perhaps the greatest blow to Lord Fisher in his later years, although he never penned a complaint nor allowed one word to escape from his lips, was the utter neglect, disregard, and one might almost say contempt, with which he was treated at the time of the surrender of the German Fleet. He was the one man in the Navy, more than any other, to whom that surrender was due; yet while, as is usual, mediocrities were well to the fore, he was, on that momentous occasion, left miserably alone and unremembered.

Such are some of the thoughts that a study of Lord Fisher's life must summon up. The chief feeling that is left must be one of sadness. Here there was a man

[1] See *Soldiers and Politicians*, by Field-Marshal Sir W. Robertson.

vouchsafed to the country, an administrative giant, and a man of indomitable courage and tenacity, whose one obsession was a love for the Navy and the Empire, the type of man a country is fortunate to find in her Navy once in a century; yet an unfortunate want of clear thinking on the part of those who guided the destinies of the nation prevented his genius for war being adequately made use of for the benefit of the country during the death-struggle of the Empire. He was not perfect, although he approached that ideal more nearly than the majority of men. He was never submitted to the supreme test of commanding in war; but his handling of the Mediterranean Fleet when in command, and his bold conceptions in strategy and tactics, as well as his proved courage, all argue that he would have made an historic reputation had he had the privilege of commanding the British Fleet in the face of the enemy.

It would be ludicrous to follow the vulgar practice of comparing him with Lord Nelson. If Nelson had never been afforded the opportunity of commanding in war, it is more than probable that that particularly lovable little man; cursed as he was by bad health; somewhat intolerant of control; and admittedly, by temperament, a poor administrator, might never have risen to even minor distinction as an Admiral. It was his success in battle that not only made him illustrious, but also created for him a tremendous popularity in the Navy and with his fellow-countrymen—a popularity which his tragic death in the hour of victory consecrated into one of veneration and almost worship. For this reason any comparison of modern Admirals with Nelson is an absurdity; for modern warfare at sea, however successfully waged, is

now devoid of all personal glamour. Nor is it necessary to attempt any such comparison. Lord Fisher's record of service in the Navy can well stand on its own merits, and does not require comparison with that of others in order to testify to the immense value that his life's work has been to the Navy and the nation.

The narrative of his work must, unfortunately, of necessity be devoid of details of his home life. Although a fond father and an excellent husband, his existence was so wrapped up in the Navy that home interests, especially in his most busy years, had to take a second place; and much of the enjoyment that greater leisure would have brought was denied both to him and to the members of his family. Even during the walks that he took with them, he was apt to be immersed in thought, and therefore taciturn.

The Navy, always the Navy! It was the first thought on rising to work at five in the morning, his last thought at night; from the age of twenty to the day of his death both his mind and body were faithful to his country and to his beloved Navy.

Much in the same way that the memory of Sir Christopher Wren has been built into his *magnum opus*, St. Paul's Cathedral, so the memory of Lord Fisher is now enshrined in, and has for a monument, that wondrous product of his creation, the modern Navy of the British Empire.

PREFACE

THE preparation of a Life of Lord Fisher was originally intrusted to Mr. Herbert Sidebotham. Early in 1928, however, he found that he had not sufficient time to devote to the work. The late Lord Fisher's Literary Trustees therefore approached the present author, who had worked in intimate association with Lord Fisher for some years, including the time that he had been preparing his schemes for the reform of the Navy and the design of the *Dreadnought*.

The present book has resulted from a mass of papers left by Lord Fisher, including letters written by him, copies of which have been kindly supplied by the recipients; the complete series of letters written to Lord Esher, as well as those written to the late Mr. Arnold White; and lastly, but by no means least, the personal reminiscences supplied by scores of officers who have served under him.

The present Lord Fisher, with a promptitude and foresight reminiscent of the Admiral, immediately after his father's death obtained from the Admiralty a complete list of all the officers, then alive, who had served with, or under, his father. He wrote to each one of these, and asked them for any information which would help the compilation of a biography. Many answers were received, together with much information which has been of the greatest value. The thanks of the Literary Trustees, Lord Fisher, and

the Author are due to Lord Esher and all the above who have helped so materially with the work.

Thanks are also due to the Editors of *The Times*, the *Review of Reviews*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the *Daily Express* for permission to publish paragraphs or prints in their possession. Also to Mr. Harold Begbie for permission to make use of his " Ballad of Farewell to Lord Fisher," to Captain Charles N. Robinson for supplying remarks regarding the Navy in olden time, and to Mr. J. F. Phillips, Deputy Librarian at the Admiralty, who was at one time Lord Fisher's confidential secretary.

Lord Fisher wrote two books—*Memories* and *Records*. Owing to the courtesy of Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton, I have been able to draw on these for incident, but not for historical facts, as they were dictated from memory late in life.

It will be appreciated by all who knew Lord Fisher, and his peculiarly free way of writing, that considerable discrimination had to be used in order to decide what not to publish. There is still much that may be given to the public at a later date, but which it is best to allow to lie dormant for the present. There is also much further evidence bearing on the several controversial subjects which have been dealt with, but which it is not necessary to use for the moment.

To avoid a wearisome number of footnotes, complete references to all the excerpts and quotations have not been given ; care, however, has been taken, as far as possible, to verify these. For the better convenience of the reader, postscripts have been added to the chapters instead of arranging appendices at the end of the volumes.

In conclusion, my thanks are due to Captain Thomas

Crease, C.B., R.N., without whose carefully compiled notes and assistance the work would have been well-nigh impossible. I have also to acknowledge the great assistance I received from Mr. Phosphor Mallam for kindly reading the typed script, and for the valuable criticisms he, as a layman, has suggested, especially for making the technical portions more clear to the general reader.

R. H. Bacon.

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Born 25th January, 1841, *at Rambodde, Ceylon.* Son of Captain William Fisher, 78th Highlanders, A.D.C. to the Governor of Ceylon, and Sophia, daughter of A. Lambe, of New Bond Street, and grand-niece of Alderman Boydell. His godmother was Lady Wilmot Horton, wife of the Governor of Ceylon; and his godfather Sir Robert Arbuthnot, Commanding the Forces in Ceylon.

Entered the Royal Navy, 13*th June*, 1854. Received a nomination for the Navy from Admiral Sir William Parker, the last of Nelson's Captains. Joined his first ship, the *Victory*, at Portsmouth on the 12th June, 1854. The *Victory* was the last ship to fly his flag as an Admiral, 20th October, 1904.

Served in the Russian War, in the Baltic (Medal), in *Calcutta*, 84 guns.

Served in the China War, 1856–60, including the capture of Canton and the Peiho forts (China Medal, Canton and Taku Clasps). Commanded the *Coromandel* as acting-Lieutenant. Served in the *Highflyer* (Captain Shadwell); *Chesapeake* (Captain Hilles); and *Furious* (Captain Oliver Jones). Returned home in 1860.

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In passing for Lieutenant, he won the Beaufort Testimonial, and was advanced to Mate on January 1860, and confirmed in the rank of *Lieutenant*, 4*th November*, 1860.

On 28th March, 1863, he was appointed, for gunnery duties, to H.M.S. *Warrior* (Captain the Hon. A. A. Cochrane), the first sea-going ironclad. Served in her for three and a half years.

On 4th April, 1866, he married Miss Katherine Delves-Broughton.

3*rd November*, 1866, was appointed to H.M.S. *Excellent*, gunnery schoolship, at Portsmouth (Captain Arthur W. A. Hood).

2*nd August*, 1869, promoted to Commander and appointed to the China Flagship.

21*st December*, 1869.—Left for China in H.M.S. *Donegal*. Served for three years on the China Station.

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III. 1872—1881 50

19*th September*, 1872, was appointed to H.M.S. *Excellent* for torpedo service. Started the *Vernon* as a torpedo schoolship. Visited Fiume to arrange for the purchase of the Whitehead torpedo.

30*th October*, 1874, promoted to Captain, and reappointed to *Excellent* for torpedo service and instructional duties, remaining till 1876.

16*th November*, 1876, appointed for special service in *Hercules*, flagship of Vice-Admiral the Hon. Sir James Drummond, Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.

15*th March*, 1877, appointed Flag-Captain to Admiral Sir A. Cooper-Key, Commander-in-Chief, North American Station, in the *Bellerophon*.

7*th June*, 1878, appointed Flag-Captain to Admiral Sir A. Cooper-Key, Commanding the Particular Service Squadron, in the *Hercules*.

1*st January*, 1879, appointed in command of the *Pallas*, corvette on the Mediterranean Station, returning home in July. President of a committee for the revision of the "Gunnery Manual of the Fleet."

25*th September*, 1879, appointed Flag-Captain to Vice-Admiral Sir Leopold M'Clintock, Commander-in-Chief, North American Station, in the *Northampton*.

IV. 1881—1882, H.M.S. "INFLEXIBLE" . . . 73

18*th January*, 1881, appointed to command the *Inflexible*, the largest ship in the Navy.

11*th July*, 1882, took part in the bombardment of Alexandria. Afterwards landed and commanded the Naval Brigade at Alexandria. Arranged for the first armoured train and commanded it in various skirmishes.

14*th August*, 1882, awarded the C.B. for service at Alexandria, also Egyptian Medal, with Alexandria Clasp; Khedive's Bronze Star; Order of Osmanieh, 3rd Class.

9*th November*, 1882, invalided home through illness contracted on active service.

V. 1883—1899 93

6*th April*, 1883, appointed to command of *Excellent* gunnery schoolship.

1*st November*, 1886, appointed Director of Naval Ordnance, occupied this post for four and a half years. Carried out the transfer of Naval ordnance and ordnance stores from War Office to the Admiralty.

2*nd August*, 1890, promoted to Rear-Admiral.

21*st May*, 1891, appointed Admiral-Superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard. Expedited the building of the *Royal Sovereign*, the first of a new type of battleship.

1*st February*, 1892, appointed Third Sea Lord and Controller of the Navy, and served in the administrations of Lord George Hamilton, Earl Spencer, and Mr. G. J. Goschen as First Lords; and Admirals

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Sir Arthur Hood, Sir A. H. Hoskins, and Sir F. W. Richards as First Sea Lords.

26*th May*, 1894, appointed K.C.B.

8*th May*, 1896, promoted Vice-Admiral.

24*th August*, 1897, hoisted his flag in *Renown* as Commander-in-Chief, North American Station.

In 1899, attended the first Hague Peace Conference as Naval Delegate.

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8*th July*, 1899, appointed Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Station. A period of great activity and of great benefit to the Navy.

1900, received the Order of the Osmanieh, 1st Class, from the Sultan of Turkey.

2*nd November*, 1901, promoted Admiral.

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5*th June*, 1902, returned to the Admiralty as Second Sea Lord, remaining until 31st August, 1903.

26*th June*, 1902, appointed G.C.B. in the Coronation Honours List.

25*th December*, 1902, launched the new scheme of naval entry and education of officers with training colleges at Osborne and Dartmouth.

2*nd May*, 1903, made his first public speech at the Royal Academy Banquet.

31*st August*, 1903, appointed Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, in order to supervise personally the inauguration of the new scheme at Osborne.

7*th November*, 1903, appointed a member of the Committee, with Lord Esher and Colonel Sir George Clarke (Lord Sydenham), to reorganize the War Office on the lines of the Board of Admiralty.

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CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS

1841—1860

In the lexicon of youth which fate reserves for a bright manhood, there is no such word as "fail."—EDWARD BULWER LYTTON.

Fisher's father and mother—Great-grandfather—His father kills rogue elephant—Jack receives his nomination—Joins the *Victory*—*Calcutta*—*Agamemnon*—*Highflyer*—Captain Shadwell—Mrs. Warden—The attack on the Pei-ho forts—Fisher's lucky escape—Captain Shadwell wounded—Christmas Day on board—Captain Shadwell invalided—Sir James Hope—Fisher turned over to the Commander-in-Chief—Passes for Mate—His life as A.D.C.—Promoted Acting Lieutenant—Appointed to *Pearl*—Commands the *Coromandel*—Joins the *Furious*—Captain Oliver Jones.

JOHN ARBUTHNOT FISHER was born on the 25th January, 1841, on the Wavenden Estate in Ceylon. His father, Captain William Fisher,[1] at that time was staff officer at Kandy. He had originally come out to Ceylon as an ensign in the 78th Highlanders (Ross-shire Buffs). His commission had been given him by Lord Raglan (at the time when the latter was Military Secretary to the Duke of Wellington) at the request of his uncle, Captain William Fisher, of the 40th Regiment, who served throughout the whole Peninsular Campaign and was mortally wounded at Waterloo. It was in response to a dying request that the commission was given to his nephew.

After arriving in Ceylon, the young ensign became A.D.C. to the Governor, Sir Robert Horton. In 1840

[1] See Plate, page 132.

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he married Sophia,[2] daughter of A. Lambe, of New Bond Street, and grandniece of Alderman Boydell, who had served a term as Lord Mayor of London. Miss Sophia Lambe, who at the time of her marriage was keeping house for her brother, F. Lambe, was by all accounts a lady of considerable beauty and charm, and in later years she has been described as "of strong build, and of prepossessing but determined appearance." Undoubtedly it was from his mother that Fisher inherited much of his extraordinary vitality and tenacity of purpose.

In a note written in 1916 Fisher gives this also as his own opinion, clothed in his usual quaint and forcible terms:

I have been fighting from my earliest youth! In fact it was reported to me by my godfather, Major Thurlow, that I fought against being weaned! Anyhow, I attribute my present vitality to the imbibing of my mother's milk beyond the legal period of nine months; she being a most magnificent and handsome woman, who married for love exactly nine months before I was born. My father was 6 feet 2 inches, also specially handsome. Why I am ugly is one of those puzzles in physiology which are beyond finding out! I didn't grow, because in the days I went to sea the poor little midshipmen were kept in three watches with insufficient food.

Major Thurlow was very full of my mother's beauty. She was very young and had just emerged from the City of London, where she was born and had spent her youth. One grandfather had been an officer under Nelson at Trafalgar, and the other a Lord Mayor. He was Boydell, a very celebrated engraver. He left his fortune to my grandmother, but an alien speculator (a scoundrel) robbed her of it. My mother's father had, I believe, some vineyards in Portugal, of which the wine pleased William the Fourth, who, I was told, came to his counting-house, 149 New Bond Street, to taste it! Next door Emma, Lady Hamilton, used to clean the doorsteps! She was housemaid there.

The Fishers were an old Warwickshire family whose

[2] See Plate, page 156.

JOHN FISHER, MIDSHIPMAN

tombs are in Packington Church, and whose history goes back to the dark ages. John Fisher's ancestors settled and dwelt at Bodmin in Cornwall; four of these were clergymen in succession.

After the death of Sir Robert Horton in 1841, Captain William Fisher sold out and settled down in Ceylon as a coffee planter. He was a good sportsman and a fine big-game shot. Amongst other exploits he killed a rogue elephant, which had interfered with the local post. In Ceylon in those days the postman ran with the mail-bag slung over his shoulder, and carried a bell at the end of a stick to proclaim his coming. The elephant discovered this, and ambushed the runner. Captain Fisher disguised himself as the postman, ran the mail, armed with his smooth-bore gun and ball cartridges, and when the elephant repeated the trick he killed him.

On both sides of his parentage, therefore, there was a fund of pluck, resource, and determination for John Arbuthnot Fisher to inherit. He left Ceylon at the age of six, and never again saw his father, who in 1866 was killed by being thrown from his horse.

Jack Fisher's godmother, Lady Horton, was instrumental in getting him into the Navy. He often stayed at her place in Derbyshire, for she was devoted to his father, who on one occasion had saved her son's life in Ceylon. Admiral Sir William Parker, the last of Nelson's captains, was a near neighbour, and, at her request, he gave the boy a nomination. The same request was also made to the Admiral by another old lady whose heart Jack seems to have captured; so, sped by these two old ladies, he went to join the *Victory* at Portsmouth.

Throughout his life Fisher loved to be in any way

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associated with the memory of Nelson. It was his proud boast that the log of the *Victory* on the 12th June, 1854, had the entry : " Joined Mr. John Arbuthnot Fisher " ; and that it was on Trafalgar Day, 1904, on board the *Victory*, that his own flag was hauled down when he left to become First Sea Lord, and to initiate the reforms which effected the complete reorganization of the Royal Navy.

He arrived at Portsmouth alone, and at once went to visit his outfitters, who found him a bed for the night. Next day he was examined for entry into the Navy. This ordeal consisted of writing out the Lord's Prayer, and jumping over a chair, naked, in the presence of the doctor ; following which he was given a glass of sherry as evidence of his having become a naval officer. This examination Fisher, in after-life, called " very simple but adequate." It was, however, very different from the one which boys had to pass under his own 1904 scheme of naval education ! After passing the examination, he took a letter of introduction from his godmother to the Port Admiral, who asked him to dinner. Much to the amusement of this officer, young Jack refused, saying that he thought he had better go on board his ship ! He was told to remain to dine and sleep, and that his ship could wait for him till the next day. This he duly did, and he then repaired on board, escorted by the Admiral's coxswain.

His reception on board was very unlike his expectations, and it gave him at once a taste of the rough life he was about to lead. It was a Saturday, so the decks were being scrubbed, and Jack was met by a bucket of water sluiced over his feet, while the white-haired First Lieutenant, without coat or stockings,

and with trousers turned up to his knees, roared at him like a "bull of Bashan." But his bark was worse than his bite, for afterwards, when he met Jack in the cockpit, he gave him an orange.

At a later date Fisher jotted down some memories of his first experiences on board:

> The oldsters amongst my messmates all had white hair! There were half a dozen of them. They had been all their lives in a midshipman's berth. They were failures, and our ship had these failures because the Captain had been tried by court-martial in his last ship for cruelty. He had flogged all the crew. The Commander was no better, he used to padlock men to a ringbolt and douse them with salt water. Any punishment was legal then. I walked the break of the poop with a coil of rope round my neck, as he said I was born to be hung!—but he had a very lovely young wife, and she used to give me Devonshire cream and jam every morning when I went to fetch her husband, as I was his Aide-de-camp and took his boat ashore every morning to bring him on board. She really was a very lovely woman—only seventeen, and he was over sixty! grizzled, fierce, and thin! He afterwards became a phenomenal Governor of a prison. No man ever went to that prison a second time! I went to see him when I was an Admiral, and he was still a Commander! I said "Sir" to him, and trembled! Such is the force of discipline! All the same, I loved him, and the Captain also, and both loved me till they died. They were each of them great for war; but, alas! peace was their portion.

But Jack was not long on board the *Victory*. On the 12th July, 1854, he joined the *Calcutta*, Captain James Stopford, at Plymouth. In February of the following year she went to Portsmouth, and in June sailed for the Baltic Fleet with supernumeraries and shell. The war being over, she returned in September. A few months afterwards she was paid off, and Captain Stopford was appointed to the *Agamemnon*, which ship was in the Mediterranean evacuating the Army in the Crimea. Jack took passage to her in the *Im-*

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pregnable. Almost immediately after he had joined they sailed for Portsmouth, where she paid off on the 12th July, 1856. So in his first two years at sea he made trips to the Baltic and to the Mediterranean; and, of course, all the passages were made under sail.

Nor did he at all appreciate his first days at sea. On the first of his seagoing trips from Plymouth to Portsmouth, on the seventh day at sea, so far from making progress, they were well to the westward of Plymouth and off the Scilly Islands. His memory of those early cruises he summed up in a single sentence: "It always seemed bad weather in those days." Master Jack was often seasick.

There is a story of him when in the *Calcutta* that is vouched for by Captain E. B. P. Kelso. Kelso's father was a talented violin player, and wishing his son to learn also, gave him the best masters available. On war with Russia breaking out, the boy went to sea, taking his violin with him. Kelso's accomplishment with the fiddle, especially as he could play many popular airs, led to his playing frequently to the wardroom officers, and as Jack Fisher had a good voice he also joined the musical party. But Jack was not going to be outdone by anybody at anything, so he saved up his money and bought an instrument, got a bandsman to teach him how to play, and soon rivalled Kelso in proficiency. It certainly will be a surprise to most of Lord Fisher's friends to know that at one time he played the violin. The episode is entirely characteristic of his dominating energy and desire to excel.

This life off the English coasts came soon to an end. The day after the *Agamemnon* paid off he joined the *Highflyer*, commanded by Captain Charles Shadwell.

Here he was thoroughly happy under a Captain whom he loved like a father, and of whom in after-years he wrote :

> He was a real saint. I saw him go into battle with a tall white hat with a gold stripe on the side of it, a post-captain's uniform tail coat, a yellow waistcoat, white trousers, and a white umbrella which he used to cheer us on to attack the enemy, and we got there all right. . . . He was knocked over and had to be sent home. He asked me on saying good-bye what he could do for me. I just loved him, so I said, " Give me a set of studs with your motto on them ' Loyal au mort.' " He did, and I've worn them for sixty years.

The *Highflyer* was bound for the China Station. On arrival at Shanghai young Jack made great friends with Mrs. Ernest Warden, whose husband was the head of the P. & O. Company in the Far East, a man of considerable importance who was supplied by his Company with a private yacht.

Mrs. Warden appears to have been one of those delightful women who possess a great fascination for midshipmen and become second mothers to them. In the old days of long commissions on foreign stations they did a world of good, and were beloved by the boys ; for their houses became the homes of the lads when in harbour, where they could pass happy evenings. In one respect Mrs. Warden was unique ; for, in addition to her care of the boys while in harbour, she appears to have corresponded regularly with several of them ; and she certainly did so in the case of Jack Fisher. Most exigeant the young gentleman was, and he never failed to " blow her up " if a mail arrived without a letter from her. His own mother appears to have written seldom, so he greatly prized those letters from Mrs. Warden. He in turn wrote

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to her every mail, letters that bubble over with energy and *joie de vivre*. It is well worth giving extracts from some of these, since they give a faint reflection of life on board ship in those days.

He left Shanghai on the 8th June, 1859, and soon after he wrote :

> We had to anchor on the night of the 10th June, on account of the wind falling light. I felt particularly miserable that night. I kept thinking where I was the night before, and wishing myself back again. I saw it was no good keeping on like that, because it was impossible for me to get back, so I went down below and ate twenty-six ginger-nuts to keep my *pecker* up, and had a glass of grog and turned in. Just fancy !

On the 30th October he was evidently feeling a little homesick :

> My dear old Mams [he always called Mrs. Warden " Mams "], —You are a good old thing *really*. I wish I were near you now to thank you, you *old brick*, for writing me such long letters. You can't think how jolly I felt for half an hour reading your letter. I have just finished reading it, and I couldn't feel satisfied till I sat down and wrote to tell you what pleasure it gave me.

Young Jack, like the other midshipmen, was soon given charge of a boat, and he was allotted the " cutter," a twelve-oared double-banked boat. One of his shipmates relates a story concerning one of the other youngsters (not Jack, who undoubtedly would somehow have kept his end up), which shows the minor troubles that young officers in charge of boats were apt to encounter :

> I remember one naval cadet who was very good-looking—you wouldn't think so if you saw him now ! He thought he would impress the natives of a savage land, so on approaching the landing-steps he shouted in as loud a voice as he could summon up, " In bow, way enough. Forward there, clear of the steps, liberty men

to land." Biddy was looking at him. Says she to the bowman, "Mr. Sailor Man, will you sell that child? Hand me up that pretty boy with roses in his cheeks, 'tis he I want to kiss." To the bowman, "Away with ye, ye brown devils. Am I not Miss Kate Macartney, attendant at this pier since Queen Victoria was born? Then you won't pass me; try then, you shall not land."

Further, is it not on record that one of the good breed that makes our Admirals was once carried along the deck of the flagship under the arms of a negress, who wished to complain to the Captain that this disgraceful boy had not paid his washing bill? The midshipman aforesaid must have been very good-looking, for women, to my own knowledge, used to stop him in the street and kiss him, much to his disgust. But midshipmen had to survive this kind of thing somehow or other!

Later Jack wrote to Mams:

The old skipper has got an idea in his head to make us all smart, so he does nothing but exercise, shortening and making sail, shifting spars, etc., etc. Now I come to think of it, I am afraid you understand but little of the foregoing, but you must take it for granted that it is something very horrid.

He passed his intermediate examination:

The examination is finished, and I am 200 ahead of all of them (I am not bragging, Mams!).

Then there is a foretaste of fighting that was to come:

The old skipper is getting up all the movements of armies, and the regulation of advanced guards and rear guards, etc.; he is making me do the same, as I am his A.D.C.

Another extract shows that the Captain had formed a considerable opinion of Jack's capacity as a seaman, although he was still a midshipman:

The old skipper behaves like a brick and lets me keep Lieutenant's watch at sea. I nearly carried some of the yards away the other day; got caught in a squall.

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18th June.—Here we are riding to an anchor a few miles from the mouth of the Pei-ho, blowing half a gale of wind. We shipped a sea just now ; it came right into our berth and wet us all through. We are knocking about tremendously, so that must account for my bad writing.

This is horribly disgusting work. We are all battened down, and it is blowing, and raining, and the old "hooker" is turning herself inside out. The galley fire is put out, so I have been making my tea off red herrings and beer.

We had a tremendous squall yesterday, split our foretopsail, blew part of our main-topgallant sail away, etc., etc., and a lot more you don't understand ; so you see it is no yacht-sailing up here, it is just like the Black Sea as regards weather.

The first China War ended in 1858. As a final act Lord Elgin, the High Commissioner, had decided to go to Pekin and treat in person with the Emperor. Such personal contact with a foreigner would have entailed on the part of the Emperor a considerable loss of prestige. Lord Elgin was therefore persuaded by the local Chinese representative to settle his treaty at Tientsin ; but it was agreed that the formal treaty should be signed the following year in Pekin.

Lord Elgin then went home, and was relieved by Sir Frederick Bruce. When the time came for Sir Frederick to go to Pekin it was found that three obstructions of iron piles and ropes had been placed across the river Pei-ho, effectually barring the passage. Admiral Hope requested the removal of these by the Chinese ; and as no notice was taken of his request, he determined to clear them away with the force under his command.

Unknown to the British, the forts guarding the entrance had been considerably strengthened, and the Chinese had received instruction in handling the guns. It was rumoured that this instruction came from

THE BATTLE ON THE PEI-HO RIVER, 25TH JUNE, 1859

From an old print

Russian subjects. The deep-water passage was narrow with mud banks on each side, and it was these banks that made the attack on the fort so difficult; many of our men stuck in the mud and were drowned, while the gunboats were subjected to a murderous fire from the batteries concentrated on them. The whole attack was a failure, and it was not until the next year, when a large force was sent out, that the object in view was attained. Such were the conditions under which young Jack, as A.D.C. to Captain Shadwell, received his baptism of fire.

23rd June.—We are just going to take the forts, so good-bye.

28th June.—Off the Pei-ho Forts.

My dear Mams,—By some wonderful means I have escaped unhurt, although my dear old Skipper has been very badly wounded in the foot, a large ball still being in it. I don't know whether I can give you a description of it; I feel in such a state of excitement. I will first tell you those who are killed or wounded that you know. Inglis, our Marine Officer, was smothered in the mud when we landed, being first wounded. Poor Huleatt is badly wounded in the groin; I don't think he will live. He fell close to me. Capt. Vansittart had his leg shot off, and Purvis is slightly wounded. There are very few wounded, I fancy, in comparison to those killed. In the *Plover*, the next gunboat to ours, twenty-six men were killed and wounded, the Admiral being one of them. Rason, her Commander, was smashed to atoms; so was McKenna, the Military Secretary, and all the Admiral's staff nearly. In the last part of the action I was the only one left to carry the orders about, the Flag Lieutenant having been sent to command the *Plover* with a fresh crew from other ships, and the Secretary being busy taking notes. *Kestrel* gunboat next but one to us, three left unhurt of her crew. We had a hard fight for it, but what could we do against such a fearful number of guns? and us poor little gunboats inclosed in such a small place, not much broader across than the length of our ship. I will try and send you a small plan of it from the plan that I had given to me for the use of my old Skipper. I got one to be sent to old Compton for a fellow who has written a description of it for him. . . .

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Poor Bowden Smith had his arm smashed. I had three fellows to look after in the *Coromandel* wounded, the old Skipper, Bowden Smith, Buckle of the *Magicienne,* and a mid. of the *Fury.*

The old Admiral behaved splendidly after he had part of his thigh and leg shot away. He had a cot swung to a pole and was carried about in a boat from the *Plover* to the *Cormorant* to encourage the men, and then was hoisted up on the bridge till he was hit again, and then they laid him down on the quarter-deck, where he remained till night. He won't be brought out to the *Chesapeake,* but will stop within range. My poor old Skipper keeps his pecker up. I was with him all day till he was wounded in the mud, and then I brought him out to the ship. Major Fisher of the Engineers told me the forts were splendidly built ; we couldn't have built better. Hills is all right ; he had to stop on board. I had to fling all my arms away coming back from the forts, and was nearly smothered once, only one of our bluejackets was kind enough to heave me out. You sank up to your knees *at least* every step, and just fancy the slaughter going 500 yards in the face of that fire of about thirty pieces of artillery right in front of you and on each flank. It was dreadful, horrible work, but thank God I came out all right. Broad, I hear, is slightly wounded, but it is only a rumour. Gallons Jones, I am afraid, has lost his gunboat. The *Kestrel* is gone down, and I am afraid the *Cormorant* will go too. They had horrid fire-balls firing at us when we landed. I saw one poor fellow with his eye and part of his face burnt right out. If a piece struck you, it stuck to you and regularly burnt you away until it was all gone. Will you be so good, Mams, as to forward the inclosed letter for my Mother, to tell her I am all right ? The old Skipper, Briggs, and myself had nothing to eat for thirty-six hours, and, very odd, we didn't feel in the least hungry. Old Hills gave me his cabin last night ; I was regularly done up. It is a sad business, is it not, Mams ? But they will be able to see by the return of killed that we fought hard for it. The Chinamen fought like anything. Some of the fellows solemnly swear they saw Russians quite distinctly when we got to the foot of the ditch. I believe they must have been Russians ; no Chinamen ever fought like those fellows did yesterday. They had fearful advantages, no doubt. I expect the Admiral will either die or go home very shortly. He never suspected the place was so strong. There are about fifty or sixty

guns more than last year, and all the old forts are rebuilt on a different principle. They were never Chinamen who planned those forts.

30*th June*.—I had to go into the forts again just after I had finished writing the above, to try and get some papers of the Captain's, and some other little things that he valued. We have lost three of the gunboats, the *Cormorant* dispatch boat, and the *Plover* and *Lee* gunboats. We burnt the *Plover* to the water's edge, or, rather, the mud edge. We have blown part of the *Cormorant* up, and we are going to have one more try for the *Lee*. It is rather ticklish work going in there, for we are only 300 yards from them at most, and they have got about twenty-five guns right in front of us, and occasionally they let us have it all. I am certain I am not born to be shot. The little *Kestrel* is sunk, but I think they will get her up all right. We have 12 men killed and 18 wounded out of 130 who left the ship ; that's pretty good, you know. We found poor Inglis's body yesterday with his jaw blown off, and frightfully disfigured by the water.

I shall expect such a long letter in answer to this. I am certain you ought to be highly flattered when I tell you that it is longer than the one I wrote to my Mother.

24*th Sept*.—Poor old Skipper is no better ; they keep cutting his foot open every now and then, as the outside heals up so fast, the inside being still the same. He is getting very sick of it and justly so, poor old fellow.

It only wants three months and a half to my passing for mate, so, as you may suppose, I am working like a horse. Shouldn't I like to be able to ask Mrs. Warden to have the next polka with me, with two epaulettes on my shoulders !

The Captain's foot got worse, and it became necessary to have an operation, involving what Jack called " two awful gashes."

He had barely recovered from the chloroform when the " artery of his foot broke adrift " and they had to operate again without waiting for chloroform, and the old fellow said quite innocently to me afterwards, " I'm afraid I made a great deal of noise this morning," as if anybody could help making a noise when they feel a man's hand hauling the inside of your foot out.

Anyhow, this settled the matter of invaliding, and Captain Shadwell had to go home :

He doesn't like leaving the ship at all. He says perhaps someone will relieve him that doesn't understand the boys and won't know how to bring us up.

The boy seemed at this time almost to live for letters from Mams. " I generally have a read at your last letter of a Sunday afternoon. I expect I shall know the last one by heart." He himself not infrequently wrote four sides of a double-page letter each day.

Here is another glimpse of the old Navy of seventy years ago :

The old gentleman was rather put out the other day. He had to flog a couple of men and dis-rate half a dozen, and that always upsets him for twenty-four hours afterwards. I got one of them three dozen, thank goodness ; the blackguard ran away from my boat on duty, and when Harcourt-Smith went to fetch him in the evening with a lot of marines, he began abusing him, so Harcourt-Smith went up to him and knocked him down, made a hole in his skull one and a half inches long ; it stunned him beautifully. The old Skipper said, " Mr. Smith, you ought to have cut him down with your sword." The man looked quite astonished ; he thought Harcourt-Smith would get into a row for striking him even.

We find Jack leaving boyhood behind, becoming more manly, and showing strength of character :

I was up on deck two or three evenings ago talking to Morant, the Third Lieutenant, and a lot more of them, and I was talking about the First Lieutenant and said, " I thought it was a most ungentlemanly, blackguard thing of him to go and laugh and talk with the old Skipper and pretend to be a great friend of his, and then come to all the officers in the ship and run him down like a pick-pocket." Just as I finished my opinion of him, he walked past me. He didn't say anything to me, for he would then have been obliged to report me to the Captain, which would not have been to his advantage.

JOHN FISHER, ACTING MATE, 1865

This is how Captain Shadwell, who was known by the youngsters as "the Angel in Epaulettes," packed up:

There was great fun in the Captain's cabin yesterday. The skipper served out all his stock among the midshipmen, and you saw fellows walking out of the Captain's cabin wadded with brown Windsor soap, tooth brushes (new ones, of course!!!), nail brushes, combs, looking-glasses, etc., etc.

Next Wednesday the Captain gives the midshipmen a farewell dinner, and on Thursday the midshipmen (presumptuous beggars) have asked all the officers to dinner to meet the Captain. The fellows in the wardroom don't like it, because it is what they ought to have done, and as they wouldn't, why, we stepped forward like *MEN*.

Twenty years and even longer after the time that Jack wrote these letters, Christmas Day generally developed into a drunken orgy on the part of the crew. The men were wont to use devilish cunning in smuggling liquor into the ship and in hiding it. This is what Christmas Day, 1859, on board the *Highflyer* was like:

In about three-quarters of an hour from this time (12 o'clock) every man in the ship will be dead drunk. Two or three have got "delirium tremens" already, so you can fancy the quantity they must take down. One of the men came to my hammock last night about half a dozen times begging and praying to be tried by court-martial; another man kept hiding himself in all sorts of holes and corners; he said he had killed a man once, and he saw the man's brother coming after him with a big knife to cut his toes off!

Eight o'clock Christmas evening.—It's awful work, this, Mams. I have just been carried round the deck four times by about thirty bluejackets, all of them making me taste their grog, etc., etc., with a fiddler and the big drum playing in front of me. I have just this minute managed to slip away after two hours of it. For the last half-hour they have been doing nothing but hugging me and wanting me to take their grog. I'd like to give them two dozen all round, the brutes. I am locked up now in old Brice's

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cabin, so am pretty safe now, but here's a blackguard just come to the door. I must put the candle out and pretend to be asleep. Oh ! I wish I was where I was this time last year. This is regular misery !

Then came the great evening of the dinner :

This will be a very short letter indeed, as we are giving a grand dinner to the Captain to-night, and the mail goes to-morrow morning, so I am awfully busy getting champagne, etc. . . . I must away, Mams, to superintend bottling off the wine. They all think we are a very *fast* lot, especially myself—

which rather indicates that Jack Fisher was the leading hand in this adventurous dinner !

In January 1860 Captain Shadwell was invalided home, but before he left, Admiral Hope came to visit him and say good-bye, and Jack was strongly recommended to the Admiral. This is the account of this episode that he wrote late in life :

He handed me over on leaving China to his friend the Admiral, who was a magnificent man ! The three ships he had commanded before he became an Admiral were the *Terrible*, *Firebrand*, and *Majestic*. That's what he was ! He came to say good-bye to my late Captain, and asked him what favour he could do him. He pointed to me standing there trembling and said, " Look after that boy ! " and the Admiral turned to me and said, " Go down into my boat ! " and he made me a Lieutenant the day I was nineteen, and put me in command of a big steamer and sent me on a piratical expedition. I pretty well wrecked the ship inside and out, but I did what he wanted, so he moved me into another command ! He gave me a never-to-be-forgotten lecture before I started on my first cruise : " Hesitate at nothing to gain your object."

In due course Fisher passed his examination for mate [1] with flying colours :

I have just passed for mate *first class* ; the Admiral has taken

[1] Mate in those days was the equivalent of Sub-Lieutenant to-day.

me in the *Chesapeake* and made me "Mate" of his boat, so you can see I am in luck's way. They took three days to pass me, as I passed on the new scale. You have no idea how very jolly I feel. The senior Post-Captain told me that I had passed such a good examination that he would mention me to the Admiral. So you see here I am. *I ought to be ashamed of bragging*, ought I not? Just fancy, Mams, with scales [1] on my shoulders, etc., would you dance with me now?

In his next letter he describes his duties with that suspicion of exaggeration which was, later on, to pervade his correspondence:

I have nothing to do with anyone on the ship except the Admiral himself, and, no mistake, he keeps me going; he hardly takes his boots off without sending for me and telling me officially of it. I have to call him at 5 a.m. He is in his cabin dressed by 7 a.m. to give orders as to what the different ships are to do; at 8 o'clock I take him a load of papers which takes me two hours of the previous evening to make out, and follow him about like a dog whenever he leaves his cabin.

I went all round Hong-Kong the day before yesterday with the Admiral in his yacht, a kind of picnic affair, and the worst of it was I had to take one end of the table, and I felt so precious uncomfortable accordingly. He is an awful proud old fellow, but he is very kind, all the same. Post-Captains have to run after him like dogs; it is such fun to see the cool way he treats them. Oh, Mams! You should see me in my scales and full-dress coat, such a beauty!

Evidently the Admiral thought a little female society would be a good thing for Jack:

Sunday.—Like a good boy I have been to Church, and here I am again. The Admiral made me go and call on Lady Robinson, the Governor's wife. How I did bless her! though she is a very nice person. While I was there Mrs. Coutts came to call, so I was off like a shot. Lady Robinson sung out after me, but it was no good: just fancy facing two strange females all by myself! It requires a man with a great deal of nerve to do that!

[1] Epaulettes without a fringe.

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Favouritism was not everything, and even in those days merit usually won :

The Admiral sent for me and told me he had a blank commission [for Lieutenant] to give away. He said he had intended giving it to me, but there was a Mate just arrived on the Station, who, on the way out, had jumped overboard when his ship was going 10 knots and saved a man, and he wished very much to reward him for it as he had been a very long time as Mate ; so he gave it to him ; but he told me that something would be sure to turn up soon and he would take care not to forget me. I don't begrudge it, because I think he deserves it more than I do ; besides, I have been such a short time a Mate. It was very good of the Admiral to send for me and explain all the circumstances, wasn't it ?

He evidently was also making his character felt among his messmates :

There's a grand Confirmation to-day ashore. I have been a very good boy. A lot of fellows here in the berth would like to be confirmed, only they are afraid of being laughed at, so I have been having a go at them.

Jack Fisher now begins to look further ahead than the mere present :

24th March.—The Admiral offered me a Lieutenant's Commission on the *Esk* the other day, the same class of vessel as the *Highflyer*, but I declined it, and he told me afterwards I did quite right, as I shouldn't go to the northward [1] in that case ; besides which it's a first-rate thing to be with an Admiral as I am, not for the good that I gain by it now, but what I shall gain hereafter in having a powerful friend to back me ; do you observe, Mrs. Warden ?

But at last the great day came :

29th March, 1860.—I am made a Lieutenant, Mams, and appointed to the *Furious* at Shanghai :

Lieut. J. Fisher,
Furious.

[1] Fighting was expected again to take place on the Pei-ho.

How does it look? Good-bye. I am too excited to write. We are going up against the monsoon to Shanghai in the *Pearl*.

And later on he writes again:

I say, Mams, I am not proud, you know, but mind you don't get making a mistake and address to J. A. Fisher, Esqre., R.N., instead of Lieut. J. A. Fisher. Now you need not laugh!

He evidently had also a taste of independent command:

I forgot to tell you that the Admiral gave me command of the *Coromandel* for four days, and I took her up to Canton and back. I was regular Captain of her. We passed close by the old *Highflyer* on our way up and down. Old Purvis and all the fellows up there could hardly believe their eyes.

Well, I really can't think, Mams, how it is that I am so lucky; I am in a dreadful fright that something will happen soon to take me down a peg or two. I have done nothing much to deserve such good fortune.

I forgot to tell you that I was very nearly *sea-sick*. Just fancy a live Lieut. being sea-sick, but I wasn't regularly. I took a stiff glass of grog and I was all right.

On the 30th March, 1860, Admiral Hope wrote to Captain Oliver Jones:

I have appointed Mr. Fisher to act as a Lieutenant in the *Furious*. He is at present in the *Pearl* for a passage and will not join you till superseded, as *Pearl* will require him more than you.

When Shadwell went away I asked him to mention to me anybody he was interested about, and he named Fisher, for which I took him into this ship.

He passed a very good examination, for which reason I promoted him; in fact, he was the first in that respect on the station.

He is sharp, well conducted, and anxious to do his duty, so that I think you will like him.

Very sincerely yours,
J. Hope.

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I have requested Bruce,[1] if he ever wants a naval officer to be with him, to ask you for Fisher.

Shadwell, on leaving, handed him over to me as a fellow he was interested in, and it is my intention not to lose sight of him. He is clever with his pen, and has done a good deal of confidential work in that way for me, and is quite to be trusted.

J. H.

Fisher was accordingly lent to the *Pearl*, which ship was short of a Lieutenant, and they had a bad time escorting a slow-sailing troopship on the northward trip. He writes about his Captain :

Captain Borlase [the Captain of the ship] wants to keep me on board here altogether. I should like to do so very much, but I know it is for my own advantage to go to the *Furious*. The Captain says he was told there was likely to be fighting at Chusan. I sincerely hope so.

The old Skipper on board here and myself are great friends. I like him very much. I am tremendously lucky ; I manage to get good friends everywhere, somehow or another ; you'll say it is a good deal more than I deserve. I think you are a *little* right.

On the 13th June, 1860, he joined the *Furious*, and later writes :

The Captain is an awful scoundrel. There has been one mutiny on board of her already through him, and he has very cunningly managed to get none but acting Lieutenants ; in fact, all the wardroom officers acting, so that he can do just what he likes with us to a certain extent, because he knows we are all young, and don't want to risk a court-martial just after we have received our commissions, and most likely the Admiral would put it down to our inexperience.

This is what Fisher also wrote late in life, with of course a certain amount of picturesque embroidery, about this old sea-dog :

When I was a young Lieutenant I got moulded by another

[1] Sir Frederick Bruce, Special Commissioner and Envoy.

ferocious Fearnought ! He was a consummate sailor, a wonderful linguist, a master of hounds, skilled in all the arts of navigation and surveying, and raised a regiment of Native Cavalry which he led with distinction in the Indian Mutiny and got the unstinted admiration of the great Cavalry leader, Sir Hope Grant. This man led me a dog's life ! As a Lieutenant he used to send me up to the maintop in my tail coat and epaulettes, after I had been dining with him, when shifting topsails or some other evolution, he being then " three sheets in the wind," as the sailors say ! He was a rich man and had unparalleled champagne ! and a French chef ! He might tyrannise ; but he fed us !

When I left the ship he gave me a certificate to say that he couldn't praise me enough !

Unfortunately the letters to " Mams " now end, so we miss any further account of Fisher's life in the *Furious* with his wicked Captain. There is only an order for him to do the work of the Navigating Officer while the latter was absent from the ship, and a further order for him to do special duty as Agent of Transports of the Sixth Division.

In March 1861 the ship sailed for England, Captain Oliver Jones being commissioned to bring home presents from the Emperor of Japan to Queen Victoria. After a six-months' passage the *Furious* arrived at Portsmouth on August 20, and paid off ten days later.

The early years of Fisher's life at sea were therefore remarkable, and full of incident. He had been five years away from England, had seen war service, served in four ships, and won the highest commendation of all his Captains and the Commander-in-Chief. He had passed for Mate with flying colours, been given an acting commission, and served eighteen months as Acting Lieutenant. With this record behind him, his feet were firmly planted on the second rung of the

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ladder, which was eventually to lead him, not only to the rank of Admiral of the Fleet and a Peerage, but also to his life's work in, and for, the Navy; whereby he made for himself a name as the greatest Sea Officer since the time of Nelson and Trafalgar.

H.M.S. *COROMANDEL*
Fisher's first command

CHAPTER II

1860—1872

Give me a spirit that on life's rough sea
Loves t' have its sails filled with a lusty wind
Even till its sail-yards tremble, its masts crack,
And his fast ship runs on her side so low
That she drinks water and her keel ploughs on.

GEORGE CHAPMAN.

The *Excellent*—Fisher passes for Lieutenant—Becomes a first-class Gunnery Lieutenant—The *Warrior*—Garibaldi's visit—Well reported on—His marriage—The *Excellent* again—Commands the *Stork*—The dance on board the *Calcutta*—The hot-water bottle—Takes over the instruction in torpedo work—Promoted—Joins the *Donegal*—Passage to China—Joins the *Ocean*—His work with the men—His religious views—Fire ashore at Nagasaki—Passage home—Heavy gale met with—Painting ship at the Cape—Paying-off report.

AFTER the *Furious* had paid off, Fisher was appointed to the *Excellent* to pass his examination for Lieutenant. Hitherto he had only passed in seamanship; he had now to qualify in mathematics and gunnery. He came through both examinations with marked success, with first-class certificates; and in mathematics he further obtained the highest marks gained by anyone in that year, and was therefore awarded the Beaufort Testimonial, a special prize endowed in memory of Admiral Sir Frederick Beaufort, a distinguished hydrographer of the British Navy. In consequence of these examinations Fisher's commission as Lieutenant was antedated to November 4, 1860.

He then joined the *Excellent* as a gunnery Lieutenant; but soon afterwards a new regulation was

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issued which ordained that, in order to become a gunnery officer, a Lieutenant must in future undergo a six-months' course at the Royal Naval College at Portsmouth, after which he would receive 1*s.* 6*d.*, 2*s.* 6*d.*, or 3*s.* 6*d.* per diem extra pay, according to the class of certificate gained at the final examination. The result of this regulation was to class all existing gunnery Lieutenants (who had had no opportunity of going through the course) as third-class gunnery officers. This did not suit Fisher, for there was nothing third class about him; so he set to work daily after his duties were done, and devoted the evenings to study. In due course he applied for a special examination, which was granted; he then obtained a first-class certificate, and became a first-class gunnery Lieutenant.

An old shipmate gives this recollection of the young staff officer:

> He applied himself rigorously to work. His main recreation was taking walks up the Portsdown Hills; but even this had a hidden purpose, for out there in the wilds he would exercise and cultivate his voice so that his words of command were given in a way that not only made novices marvel, but electrified the men and made them work as if for their lives. Fisher was rather a terrifying examiner in practical gunnery. He used to stare at his victims without any expression on his face, and only by the movements of the pencil could it be guessed that dots and crosses were being registered with a consequent loss of numbers. He was absolutely fair.

That "vacant" expression remained with Fisher all his life. Whenever during a conversation he was analysing or digesting a remark, his lips parted slightly and his face assumed an expression of complete vacuity which was most disconcerting to anyone who

wished to gather information as to how the remarks were affecting him.

The following quaint account of an incident that happened on board the *Excellent* is given by an old seaman :

> The Lords of the Admiralty were paying their annual visit to the ship, and during drill with the guns, at which I was powder-boy, one of the Admirals was heard to remark to the others, "Is this Lieutenant Fisher as good a seaman as he is a gunnery man?" Lieutenant Fisher at once stepped forward and said, in my hearing, "My Lords, I am Lieutenant Fisher, just as good a seaman as a gunnery man." At which they each bowed their heads.

He soon earned a reputation for efficiency and smartness, and when the gunnery Lieutenant of the *Warrior* left that ship in March 1863, Fisher was appointed in his place. The *Warrior* was then the finest ironclad afloat, and was in fact the first iron battleship. She was commanded by the Hon. A. Cochrane, a son of Lord Dundonald, of world-wide naval fame, and George Tryon[1] was her Commander. She was duly sent round the British ports so as to be seen by the taxpayers, and vast numbers of people visited the ship. A tale is told of Fisher's ready resource, in matters other than strictly professional, during the stay of the ship at Liverpool. As usual on these occasions, the visitors invaded the whole ship, including even the cabins and the private living-quarters of the officers. One day when the officers were at lunch a party of girls took up a position at the skylight overlooking the wardroom, and indulged in wit of the cockney type, which was intended to be funny, but was, really, in vulgar taste. Fisher stood

[1] Afterwards Admiral Sir George Tryon, drowned in the loss of the *Victoria*.

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this for some time, and then remarked in a loud tone across the table, " If those young women only remembered the state of their *lingerie*, they would not stand right over our heads ! " The girls quickly disappeared.

It was during the visit to Liverpool that the incident occurred, often related by Fisher, of the captain of the maintop returning thanks to the Mayor for having entertained the men of the Fleet. This story lost nothing when told by Fisher. It seems that the Admiral was rather anxious regarding the possible insobriety of the men if they were treated to unlimited beer. The Mayor was therefore asked to provide them only with two bottles apiece ; and, of course, these were soon finished. On rising to return thanks, in an impromptu speech, the plain-spoken seaman was determined to rub in this lack of refreshment, so he began, " I should like, on behalf of my topmates, to thank the Mayor and Corporation for a first-class dinner and the best beer we've ever drunk." Then he turned to the man next to him. " Bill," he said, " 'and me up that beer again." Then, on being told, what he knew only too well, that there was no more beer left, he looked mournfully round and said, " What, no more left ? " Of course, more beer was provided. Thus refreshed, the gallant seaman continued his speech : " Here we are, British sailors surrounded by females " (frantic cheers from the gallery). " What was it like, shipmates, coming into this harbour ? Why, it was like sailing into a haven of joy before a gale of pleasure." Fisher then persuaded the orator to stop. More beer followed, and finally they all marched back in sections of fours, Fisher insisting on each four linking arms to keep themselves steady and in good formation.

One of Fisher's most valuable innovations at this time was the order "Still," which was given either by word of mouth or bugle. This may appear to be a small matter, but in reality it was not so. This order, or the bugle call, imposed *instant* immobility on the whole of the ship's company. During work aloft this was most useful, for the ability to stop all action instantly has often been the means of preventing an accident and loss of life. During gunnery and other drills it is also of value, as it supplies the means of stopping work and pointing out, on the spot, mistakes that have been made. Lastly, the instant obedience which the order demands affords good disciplinary training.

All Fisher's old shipmates who have written their reminiscences of the *Warrior* agree in recording his high spirits in the wardroom mess, where he was the life and soul of all that went on. The description that he wrote of his amateur band fully bears out this statement:

> I got on very well except for skylarking in the wardroom, for which I got into trouble. There was a dear old grey-headed Paymaster, and a mature Doctor, and a still more mature Chaplain, quite a dear old saint. Those, with other willing spirits of a younger phase, I organised into a peripatetic band. The Parson used to play the coal-scuttle, the Doctor the tongs and shovel, the dear old Paymaster used to do the cymbals with an old tin kettle. The other instruments we made ourselves out of brown paper, and we perambulated, doing our best. The Captain came out of his cabin door and asked the sentry what that noise was. The sentry said: "It's only Mr. Fisher, sir." So he shut the door! The Commander, George Tryon, wasn't so nice! He sent down a message to say the gunnery Lieutenant was "to stop that fooling." However, this only drove us into another kind of sport.

One of his shipmates records the first sight of the

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smart gunnery Lieutenant of whom he had heard so much, and of whom he stood in great dread. It impressed him greatly. Soon after joining he looked down the wardroom skylight and saw Fisher standing on the table, singing a weird song he had picked up in China, with a refrain of "Ching a ling chow chow," and dancing a grotesque dance, probably of his own invention. He adds that when at "general quarters," that is, with the men at fighting stations exercising gun drill, he was nearly bowled over with surprise at Fisher's stentorian voice as he drilled the quarters.

> He was a dear boy [writes one of Fisher's old friends], so full of fun and humour, but at the same time so really dignified and strict on duty; the contrast was quite understood by his brother-officers and duly appreciated. As gunnery officer he was quite unique.

The *Warrior* had a battery of forty 68-pdr. guns, and Fisher made these leap when at drill. The men in those days were seamen first, and gunnery came second. The smartness of a ship was estimated more on the results of drill aloft than by gun drill, so that they judged their officers more from the seamanship than from the gunnery standpoint. At first they were disposed to look on Fisher rather as a smart gunner than as a smart seaman, but they soon found that he was just as smart a seaman as he was a gunnery Lieutenant, and that he was perfectly well able to teach them a trick or two at their own trade; so, before long, he worked his way into their hearts and there was nothing that they would not do for him. When the ship took in coal, he went into the coal lighters to work with the men, an innovation that was looked on rather askance in those days, but is now a commonplace occurrence. On one occasion he was dis-

covered as black as a sweep when the Port Admiral unexpectedly came on board and wanted to see the guns worked; and his appearance seems to have pleased that officer immensely.

The Fleet left early in 1864 for a cruise to Madeira, and from there proceeded to Teneriffe, which port they had to leave after a single day owing to a heavy on-shore wind. At Gibraltar a telegram was received ordering the Fleet home. This was on account of Germany's aggressive policy against Schleswig-Holstein. The Government eventually decided to remain neutral, so the telegram was cancelled, and the *Warrior* went on to Lisbon, and then back to Portland.

The following is Fisher's own account of General Garibaldi's visit to the *Warrior* in 1864, written two days afterwards. The General had come to England just after the last of his great victories in Italy. Only four years before he had turned 20,000 Neapolitan regular troops out of Sicily with his own 1,000 recruits; and, continuing his campaign, he caused 20,000 more to capitulate and surrender Naples. It is not surprising that Garibaldi appealed to Fisher's instinct for hero-worship:

He first of all went on board the *Edgar*, Admiral Dacres' flagship, but he only stayed there a few minutes, as he wished to see the *Warrior*. He then came on board of us, and shook hands with the Lieutenants, bowed to the rest of the officers, and then walked up on a place raised a good height above the deck. When he got up there, the Commander waved his hand, and every man in the ship marched round, four deep, the band in front, playing the Garibaldi hymn. It looked very well to see 750 men marching round, all good stout fellows and well dressed.

Garibaldi was greatly pleased and said the men marched just like soldiers. He turned round to the Duke[1] and said that he

[1] Duke of Sutherland.

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1864

didn't wonder at the English Navy beating every other when each man was so perfect in himself. Colonel Pearce (Garibaldi's Englishman) struck up the words of the Garibaldi hymn, and most of the Italians who were with him joined in ; they were all so excited.

After this, Garibaldi went down on the gun-deck, and we went to general quarters and commenced firing away like fun, and went through all sorts of different evolutions with the guns ; first we supposed the enemy on one bow and then on the other ; in fact, the enemy was everywhere in the course of ten minutes. The men worked the guns splendidly ; I never saw them (the guns) moved quicker before. Garibaldi turned round to me and said "he was very much pleased indeed," and he afterwards said it was the finest thing he had seen in England. I believe, if I had told the men that Garibaldi wished it, they would have pitched every gun in the ship overboard in four minutes, though each of them does weigh 5 tons. After this he left us, telling us, in leaving, that he had seen one of the things he had set his heart on seeing, and that was the *Warrior*. I had a good look at him, for the Admiral made me go round with him everywhere to explain things he wanted to know about the guns, etc. I thought him looking very worn and done up. I don't wonder a bit at people being so enthusiastic about him, for he has such a noble face and at the same time such a very simple manner.

This account rather dispels the myth that the ship's company sang the Garibaldi hymn. It would, indeed, have been a *tour de force* to teach 750 bluejackets an Italian hymn in eight hours !

In March 1864, when the ship was at Lisbon, she was inspected by the Admiral. Fisher afterwards wrote to his aunt :

I am glad to say we came out A1. The Admiral [Sir Michael Seymour] was awfully civil to me, and said he had hardly ever in his life seen a ship in such splendid gunnery order, and that he should bring my conduct to the notice of the Admiralty.

The gun drill that was carried out during this inspection sounds peculiar in these present days of heavy guns totally enclosed in thick armoured bar-

MRS. FISHER AT THE TIME OF HER MARRIAGE

bettes. In those days there was a row of guns on each side of the deck, with nothing between them. Ships, when fighting, were as a rule engaged on one side only, and it might well happen that a gun on the engaged side would be disabled and one would be required from the other side to take its place. Hence part of the inspection-drill consisted in moving guns from one side of the deck and mounting them on the other side. The guns were 95-cwt. guns firing a 65-pdr. shot. Fisher records that four guns were shifted on this occasion. The times from the order being given to the gun being changed over, mounted, loaded, and fired were, for the first gun 3 min. 15 sec., second gun 3 min. 16 sec., and for the other two that had to be lifted over the chain cables, 4 min. 0 sec. and 4 min. 1 sec. respectively. A 68-pdr. gun was transported the whole length of the ship, from a bow port to a stern port, and fired in 3 min. 5 sec. The crew of 314 seamen was divided into 106 seamen-gunners and acting seamen-gunners and 208 trained men.

One day when at sail-drill in the *Warrior* a man fell from aloft, struck the hammock rail, and fell overboard. The Commander, George Tryon, rushed to the accommodation-ladder platform some twenty feet above the water and dived in. The high dive knocked the wind out of him, and he was soon in difficulties. Fisher at once went on to the same platform, but he ran down the ladder and dived in from the water level to go to Tryon's assistance; others had already gone to help the bluejacket. His action showed how quickly he appreciated the fact that the small delay in entering the water, that was incurred by running down the ladder, was amply repaid by subsequent efficiency when swimming.

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1866

During one of the periodic visits of the *Warrior* to Portsmouth, Fisher met Miss Delves-Broughton, who, with her mother, had come on a visit to Southsea to see her brothers, who were both in the Navy. They became engaged, and on the 4th April, 1866, John Arbuthnot Fisher married Frances Katharine Josephine Delves-Broughton.

The Delves claimed as an ancestor a certain Delves of Doddington, who fought at the battle of Poitiers; and the Broughtons were descended from Brian Broughton, who was created a Baronet by Charles II. It is interesting to note that Fisher himself claimed descent from Sir Clement Fisher, whose wife rode pillion behind the same merry Monarch, who was disguised as her servant, when he fled after the battle of Worcester.

The marriage was a most happy one. A better wife for an ambitious young officer it would have been hard to find. From the very first she devoted herself to helping her husband in his career, as evidenced by a letter she wrote to a friend in which she said that she "intended to see her husband rise to the top of his profession, and would never stand in his way, even if it meant years of separation." She relieved him of all the worries attendant on house-keeping and children, and throughout their lives was a helpmate in the best sense of the word. A few years after his marriage we find Fisher advising all young officers to marry, advancing as the reason that "he owed all his recent success to his wife."

After fifty-two happy years, Lord Fisher, at her death, testified to her devotion. He wrote: "She married a 'boy' Lieutenant, who was penniless and friendless, with the blood of the Plantagenets in her veins, and

left him with a coronet and covered with his flag of Admiral of the Fleet at her death."

He served three and a half years in the *Warrior*, where he trained more men to be seamen-gunners than all the rest of the ships in the Channel Squadron trained jointly in the same time. He left to join the *Excellent* Gunnery School for the second time in November 1866.

The late Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Wilson records his first meeting (in June 1864) with Fisher at a lecture given by the latter to the qualifying gunnery Lieutenants. The lecture, on the sea-going duties of a gunnery Lieutenant, was drawn from his experiences in the *Warrior*. The main feature was a narrative of the cunning devices he used in order to get the Commander to detail men for gunnery drills instead of employing them in cleaning, painting, and polishing the ship. His method, which was highly entertaining as recounted, consisted chiefly in the artful use of judicious flattery, at which he was a past master. In those days the appearance of a ship was placed on the same level as smartness in drill aloft, and gunnery efficiency was less considered, since the drill took place between decks and could not be seen by other ships.

Soon after joining the *Excellent*, he was appointed to the command of the *Stork*, the Gunnery School gunboat tender, remaining of course still a member of the Gunnery School.

An event that is remembered by all his old *Excellent* shipmates was the ball given in the *Calcutta*, which hulk was about to become a part of the Gunnery School by being moored ahead of the old three-decker *Excellent*, with a connecting bridge between them. Fisher, with his wife's help, started and organized the

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whole scheme. He persuaded his messmates that it was their duty to give a ball and "hang the expense." By subtle persuasion the Admiral-Superintendent agreed to the *Calcutta*[1] being brought alongside the Dockyard; and then, as the reward of apt cajolery, gas and water were laid on board her. A huge awning was erected, decorated with foreign ensigns and other flags. The effect of the vast space of the upper deck, the height of the awning, the fountain, flowers, sitting-out places on the main deck, and the supper on the lower deck, was such that everyone voted it the finest ball within the memory of Portsmouth and the Navy. His messmates were so pleased that they entertained him to a magnificent dinner, and a bracelet was presented to Mrs. Fisher. In returning thanks he amused the company with one of those flashes of wit that often broke out, he parodied the *Excellent's* motto of "Si vis pacem para bellum" into "Si vis jolly dinnerum para ballum." The dinner ended, at Fisher's suggestion, in the chase of one of the members over Southsea Common, after which they separated for the night!

In the *Excellent*, when a staff officer, he once brought the gunboat tender down in the dark from Whale Island, then a small bare island crowning the mud flats. All who knew Portsmouth Harbour in those days will testify to the difficulty of the navigation of the tortuous creeks at night; moreover, on this occasion there was a strong ebb tide running, and as there was no room in the creek to turn, he brought

[1] In this ship Fisher served as Naval Cadet, Midshipman, Sub-Lieutenant, Lieutenant Commander, and Captain. On the ship being broken up the Admiralty presented the figurehead to Lord Fisher, who had it erected in the garden at Kilverstone Hall.

ADMIRAL SIR FREDERICK W. FISHER WHEN A MIDSHIPMAN

The " Hot-water Bottle "

the vessel down *stern first*. This exploit created quite a small stir in the ship at that time.

It was just at this time that his younger brother, William, was preparing to join the Navy, and the lad often visited the *Stork* and spent the night on board. Fisher had a marine servant, one of those knowing old seamen-soldiers who could do anything from working aloft to valeting an officer, could steer the ship, or go through his company drill, take on the duties of Captain of the hold or ship's butcher, and yet turn up at inspection with a perfect kit and as smart as paint. This paragon, so the story goes, used to put young Bill Fisher into Jack's bed to warm it, the weather being very cold; and, when the time came for Fisher to retire, the temporary hot-water bottle was evicted by the marine and put to bed on the cabin floor. All who know "Uncle Bill" will be surprised to learn that he started his Service career as a hot-water bottle!

During the time that Fisher was First Lieutenant of the *Excellent* he took a leading part in starting the Gunnery Club, which was established in Totterdale's hotel by gunnery officers, the rest of the Service being eligible as honorary members. This was a short-lived affair, but indirectly it had the effect of starting a good Naval Club at Portsmouth. The officers of the General Service were not content with being dependent on the gunnery officers for their Club, so the present Naval Club was started about 1869–70, principally by officers who were then serving in the *Bellerophon* and Royal Yacht; and the Gunnery Club soon afterwards collapsed.

In June 1869 Fisher took over the instruction of torpedo work on board the *Excellent* from Commander

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Henry Kane. "Torpedoes" was the generic term applied to all classes of underwater mines; it subsequently embraced locomotive torpedoes, such as the Brennan and Whitehead. The course of instruction included elementary electricity as applied to naval work. The whole subject was in its earliest infancy. Commander Kane had commenced to write a manual dealing with torpedo work and electricity: this Fisher completed; but, not being satisfied with the scope of the volume, he devoted much of his time subsequently, when at sea, to writing a more comprehensive work. Fisher held this instructional appointment for six months.

In August 1869 Fisher was promoted, and in November he left the *Excellent* to join the *Donegal* as Commander, in which ship he took passage to China to join the *Ocean*. In those days a ship taking out a relief crew for a similar ship would often have crowded into her relief ships' companies for one or more smaller ships. The result was that the *Ocean* was badly overcrowded. The ship's company numbered approximately 1,300, of whom 250 were boys, while there were more than 50 officers in the wardroom. Fisher worked hard, and by having new cabins built wherever space permitted, he alleviated, as much as possible, the general discomfort.

One of his old shipmates writes:

> I first saw "Jacky" standing on the poop of the old *Donegal* giving instructions to the assemblage of drafts as they arrived from the several depôt ships and barracks. His orders were like peals of thunder, given in a *good* gunnery style. His arrangements were complete in every detail; there was not the least confusion with all these men who were mustered on the Dockyard jetty. The seamen-gunners were the first to arrive, and were placed in charge of the various sections for issue of bags and hammocks. As the men received the above, they were passed to the First

Lieutenant, and were given their stations and full particulars of their duties. So thoroughly had all the little details been thought out that, by supper-time, everything was working as if the ship had been in commission for years.

The *Donegal* sailed on the 21st December, but owing to meeting with a gale of wind in the Channel on the first night, she put back to St. Helens anchorage, and received dockyard assistance to make good damage to lower-deck ports, etc. She sailed again on the 23rd, Christmas Day being spent in the Bay of Biscay. The first port of call was Madeira, and while there the bumboats came alongside. It was made known to the Commander that liquor was being smuggled into the ship. The pipe went, "Watch in bumboat." In the space of a few minutes a large bumboat was being hoisted in, and when landed was searched and proved to be a veritable spirit-store. Although the bumboatmen appealed, and the authorities on shore interceded, Fisher kept them prisoners until the ship got under way next day. He then hoisted them and their boat out while the ship was moving out of harbour, dropping them some 15 feet on to the water by means of a slip toggle—a very salutary lesson.

In the early part of the commission a man was brought before him for refusing duty. Jacky told the man, "Now, if a petty officer tells you to stand on your head, you must stand on your head; then if I find out that the petty officer told you to stand on your head wrongly, I'll make him stand on his head; but mind, implicit obedience is your duty."

The passage to China round the Cape was taken up by continual drills and exercises of every description; so that when the crews arrived at Hong-Kong they were thoroughly efficient in all kinds of gunnery, rifle,

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and sail-drill exercises, of which the last played a very important part in those days.

> I believe [wrote one shipmate] that Jacky could call every one of the 1,300 men on board by his right name, and not only call him by name, but could tell him where he was born and what his religion was supposed to be. On arrival, a crew was picked for the *Ocean*, the remainder of the men being distributed to other vessels. I may say that in all my forty years' service I never came across the equal of the *Ocean's* ship's company for efficiency.

The *Ocean* was the first ship in the Service to be equipped with electric firing for her guns, and this was fitted by men trained by Fisher. The battery was a simple pile battery built up of alternate zinc and copper plates wetted with vinegar and water. After use the plates had to be scoured with sand. One day Fisher found that the men so employed were making too much noise, so he joined them all up to the battery, holding each other's hands, and gave them a shock of sufficient severity to prevent them from letting go their neighbour's hands until he had broken the circuit. Of course in those days, when electricity was in its infancy, this was accounted black magic. He did much the same thing with the old gunner who suffered from rheumatism, and the old boy fell backwards shouting for help, but apparently he was cured; at all events, he never came for a repetition of the treatment.

The drill of the main-deck battery at general quarters was a sight worth seeing. Fisher would stand aft and with his powerful voice move the whole battery as one man. It was the very acme of perfection of gunnery as practised in those days. At sail-drill it was the same. He would give an order, "Make plain sail *in two minutes*," "Way aloft," and it was done.

Although a very strict disciplinarian, he was just and humane, and he would never spoil a man's future if it could possibly be avoided. Although he dealt out severe punishments for serious offences, a large number of these were entered in the records only in pencil; and if the man afterwards showed signs of improvement, the charge would be wiped off the slate, thus not affecting his future or pension.

The first two years of the commission were very hard with continuous exercises, but also very happy. Fisher was a perfect organizer; the minutest detail was well thought out and he was always ready to learn himself. Whenever he was preparing for any new evolution, he would call together the officers and petty officers concerned and thresh out every detail. He would ask each and every one to give his experience or an opinion, and if he thought any suggestion better than his own idea, he would always give it a trial, leaving the person whose suggestion it was to arrange the details.

When punishing, he had a cure for everyone, and he usually dealt out a kind of homœopathic treatment. An A.B. was brought before him for being drunk and unfit for duty for four hours. "Well, what have you got to say, Williamson?" asked Fisher.—"Well, sir, I went to the main-deck tank for a drink of water, and I found a basin on the tank. I took it down and it was full. I thought it was water, and I drank it. I found it was Old Tom" (gin).—"Oh," said Fisher, "this is serious. Some fellow has been trapping you. Put on your cutlass and keep sentry-go over that tank. You understand," he said, turning to the Master-at-arms, "Williamson is to live at the tank, sleep at the tank, and never be out of sight of the tank until he has caught this wily customer."

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The principle on which he acted was that the best way to get work done was to keep everyone in a good humour. When coaling ship it was his habit to go down into the lighters with the men, where he got as black as a sweep, and during the work he kept them amused with his remarks. He was not what might be called a ship-decorator; in fact the *Ocean* was a rotten old craft which it was impossible to make look pretty; but, on Sundays, by means of polished wood covers and other details, he did what he could to "dress up the old ship for the Lord's Day." He was deeply religious, but had no use for church politics; his was a simple and practical religion. He was particularly sympathetic in an unostentatious way with people in distress, especially when they were ill. One of his shipmates fell victim to an organic disease, from which there could be no hope of recovery. As the ship was then lying at Nagasaki, it was some time before the patient could be sent to hospital in Yokohama. In the interval Fisher insisted on himself taking on the nursing of the poor fellow, and no trained or experienced nurse could have done the work better by night and by day. All noises likely to disturb the patient were prohibited, and even the ship's bell was not allowed to be struck. On the doctor[1] expressing astonishment at his success as a nurse, Fisher told him he had learned that by looking after cases in his own family.

Religion and beliefs are personal and private matters, and it is not well, even after nearly sixty years, to make public sentiments that were at the time intended only for one other kindred mind. The follow-

[1] This information was given by Surgeon Walter Reid, afterwards Sir Walter Reid, Inspector-General of Hospitals.

ing letters, however, will suffice to show how true and deep were Fisher's feelings at this period of his life :

H.M.S. "Ocean" at Sea (Hong-Kong to Singapore).
25th November, 1871.

We got away from Hong-Kong three days ago, and ever since I have been very busy getting things to rights on board. We have got no end of new men and officers, who all want telling everything.

Two years ago to-day since we commissioned the *Donegal*. Everything then was so black, such an exceptionally uncomfortable way of starting, not in one's own ship, and over 1,200 people were packed on board anyhow, and, most of all, I did not feel that I knew my work, and so my mind was never at rest. I was constantly picturing myself as utterly failing in my work and having to come home on half-pay, much to everyone's surprise, and I could fancy so many fellows rubbing their hands at it : "He could drill 'em very well on the Common,[1] but he had never been out of Portsmouth Harbour in his life ; so what could you expect ? " "The *Excellent* ought to be done away with," etc., etc. I am astonished myself that I have done so well, and I thank God most heartily for it, as I am sure it was not in me naturally ; I look back with wonder at the way I got through many very trying occasions.

I must tell you of a book I have been lately reading by Dr. Vaughan, called *Christ the Light of the World*, being twelve sermons on our Saviour. Really, a most delightful book. It was given me by a Mr. Piper, who was Colonial Chaplain at Hong-Kong, and is now a missionary there. I must copy out a little bit for you. It is not by any means the best in the book, but I think you will like it. . . .

[Here followed a four-page quotation from the book.]

I heard from Captain Goodenough telling me of his appointment as Naval Attaché to all the European Courts. It will suit him exactly, but I don't think I should like the berth at all, especially as I can't speak any foreign language. I feel my want of French and German the more I think of it, and I almost despair of ever learning them.

28th November.—I have just been having a heavy lunch with the Admiral. He knows I hate dinners ; and so he asks me to

[1] Southsea Common, where the *Excellent's* seamen went for battalion drill.

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lunch and always kills a turkey for the occasion. He certainly is most kind to me. I do pity the old gentleman very much—he has such a dreadful bad life to look back upon, at least so I fear. Then he hardly has any friends, and those he has are, I believe, looking out for his money ; and he is now completely broken down in mind and body and everything else. I sometimes doubt his ever reaching home.

27th November.—Off Saigon on the coast of Cochin-China. We expect to get into Singapore in four days' time, when my hard work will commence again. It is quite a holiday for me being at sea. I look forward with such glee to the time when I shall be a Post-Captain, but I have no doubt that I shall then often be wishing to be back at my present work. Never having an idle moment makes the time pass very quickly, and keeps one from all sorts of evil notions which are bound to come into one's head when idle.

I came across these words in Jeremy Taylor yesterday : " After the beginnings of thy recovery be infinitely fearful of a relapse." . . .

29th November.—It is a very rough day to-day. I am obliged to have the port barred in, as the seas are washing right up over the ship's side. It is so grand to see the great waves dashing about all round, and they seem to lash themselves into such fury when they find the ship going through them in such a despising sort of manner. The sky to-day is all very gloomy and lowering, and this, with the high seas and strong wind and the ship wallowing about a good deal, makes it a very uncomfortable sort of day.

Have I told you how much I like that Exhortation (I think it's called) in the Commination Service ? There's one part of it that I so much like that I now daily read it in the morning. It really is under *three heads*, and I have so copied it out at the end of my Prayer Book ; and, as I read it (this part that I have copied out), I pray to God that He will enable me to comply with what He requires of me.

I think the *Christian Year* is a most marvellous book. The casual reader would, I am sure, never be taken by it. I know this from experience ; but, after reading Keble's Life and his Sermons, there seems quite a new light thrown over the book. I admire every line of it. There seem to me to be volumes of sermons in every line of it.

2nd December.—I have only time for a few lines as I have got Commander Blomfield coming to dinner. He's a nephew of the

late Bishop of London of that name. He seems a very nice fellow, and is Captain of the *Teaser*, a small gun-vessel here.

The old Admiral has gone to live on shore. He is so very full of kindness to me ; I think he fancies that Captain Hewitt does not treat me properly. He wrote me a very nice letter and gave it to me to-day. I think I shall send a copy of it to Tryon at the Admiralty ; but have not yet made up my mind. . . . I have been dreadfully down on my luck yesterday and to-day, but am much better this evening, but Captain Hewitt does try me very much at times. I don't think he means it, but he has a most ungovernable temper ; I always feel so angry with myself for worrying, more especially as one thinks of those prayers I daily say, " Never murmuring, welcoming Thy gentle chastisement and fatherly correction," and when I get vexed like this I keep on saying to myself very often, " I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou of very faithfulness hast caused me to be troubled " ; " In the multitude of the sorrows that I have had in my heart Thy comforts have refreshed my soul." They come out of some psalm, but I forget which.

3rd December. Advent Sunday.—After reading the service on board here I went ashore to church, as I felt quite sure we should have the sacrament. Such a beautiful church and the service was so well done. I mean so solemnly and quietly, and the hymns from Ancient & Modern were sung most beautifully. I don't know when I enjoyed anything more. I do so wish the custom could be introduced of keeping churches always open. I should so much like to go ashore and sit in this one for half an hour.

I am so longing for this weary passage to be over. I don't know what to say about the *Cambridge*[1] ; it will be very pleasant, no doubt very pleasant indeed, but I don't think it would be good for me professionally. I can't help feeling that I ought to keep at sea as much as possible ; for one reason in particular, I don't want to go to the *Cambridge*, she is more or less second fiddle to the *Excellent ;* but if I go where I am ordered I can't do wrong, and I love to think that God regulates even the most trifling actions of our lives. I don't think that it is at all wise to bother oneself with plans about the future. A sentence in the seventh chapter of Corinthians has just caught my eye :

" But I would have you without carefulness."

[1] This was the Gunnery School at Devonport, a very second-rate appointment compared to the *Excellent*.

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I seem to be continually coming across passages in the Bible which almost seem to be sent to one. Now, yesterday I was worrying myself about my plans in the future and imagining all kinds of disagreeables when I happened to open my Church Service and the first words my eyes lighted upon were :

"*Man's goings are of the Lord, how can a man then understand his own way?*"

I have got to begin work at half-past two to-morrow morning and shall be working all day long. I got such a nice letter from dear old Shaddy [1] the day before yesterday from Aden. I often have a vain regret that I am not with him.

4th December.—I have been working very hard indeed since 3 o'clock this morning, so can only write a few lines, for I am feeling so very tired. We hear that the King of Siam is coming on board of us in a few days' time on his way to Calcutta—a horrid nuisance, I think.

5th December.—I dined last night aboard the *Teaser* with my friend Blomfield, and met there an equally charming fellow, the Commander of the *Reynaldo*, by name George Robinson, and I am to dine with him to-morrow evening, and then they both dine with me. So you see there is quite a little round of dissipation going on, but they are about the only two Commanders out here to whom I have taken a fancy. I am so sorry that I should only have just met them, as we are leaving the station.

Fisher spent all his time on board the *Ocean*, working often far into the night, at schemes for the improvement and modernizing of the Navy. He held that, if the Navy was to continue supreme upon the seas, it must no longer rely on the methods of Nelson's days, and that it must be reconstituted from top to bottom both as regards its personnel and matériel. Many of the reforms he effected in later days were first conceived during his service on board the *Ocean*.

The tone of the wardroom mess appears to have been higher than that of the average ship of that period ; for it is recorded that an American Chaplain,

[1] Admiral Shadwell, his Captain in the *Highflyer*.

after dining on board, expressed his surprise at "not having heard one 'goddam' from soup to peanuts."

While the *Ocean* was lying in Nagasaki Harbour, a fire broke out in the native part of the town, where there were only wooden houses. Assistance was asked from the ships in harbour, and in the space of about twenty minutes the whole ship's company of the *Ocean* was landed. The masterly way in which the Commander took charge was much commented on at the time. The marines had orders to clear every Japanese out of the fire-zone, and to form a cordon while an explosive party blew down a number of houses; thus cutting off the burning part of the town and preventing the flames from spreading. The whole fire was under control in the space of an hour. The Captain received the thanks of the local authorities, who greatly praised the way in which the fire had been got under.

Fisher enjoyed immensely landing the ship's company for field days, especially at Kowloon, when at Hong-Kong. The white canvas gaiters, worn by sailors for thirty years afterwards when operating ashore, were invented by Fisher for his drill parties.

The *Ocean* was first laid down as a wooden line-of-battleship, and afterwards was converted to an iron-clad by bolting iron plates on to the ship's side. On her way home she met a typhoon off Madagascar, during which she rolled 40 degrees each way, and hung badly at the end of each roll—a very bad sign so far as stability was concerned. The great weight of the iron plates opened out the ship's sides from the decks, owing to this excessive rolling; so that it looked as if the ship would eventually tear herself to pieces. The heavy rolling also caused some of the

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guns, although double-breached, to tear their securing bolts from the ship's side, in consequence of which the guns broke adrift, and smashed backwards and forwards across the deck. At the height of the gale the Captain determined to furl all the square sails, and to "lie to" under storm fore-and-aft sails. Trouble was experienced furling the fore topsail, so Fisher went aloft to encourage the men; and was there for some hours, during which time he had his coat blown completely off his back. All this happened shortly after the *Captain* had been lost in the Bay of Biscay, and it was largely by good luck that the *Ocean* was not lost also. The Surgeon relates that he had occasion to go to the Commander's cabin, on some service matter, after Fisher had come down from aloft; there he found him treating the old Boatswain to a bottle of champagne! During this gale no food could be cooked in the conventional manner, so "lob scouse" [1] was resorted to, a large pot being hung up in the wardroom, which was awash with salt water, and anyone who was hungry helped himself as best he could with a long-handled spoon hung up nearby for the purpose.

On arrival at the Cape the ship was much weather-worn after her long passage from China and from the effects of this gale. Everyone expected that leave would be given to the officers and men, but Fisher was bent on having the ship smartened up before anyone went ashore. The day before their arrival he sent for the ship's steward and asked what the men were going to have for dinner. On hearing it was salt pork, Fisher countermanded this ration and told the steward to serve out preserved meat instead, and make

[1] Lob scouse was a hotch-potch of scraps put into a pot and left to simmer—a useful dish when more refined cooking was impossible.

H.M.S. *DONEGAL*

"Fanny Adams." The tins in which the meat had been preserved were converted at once into paint-pots; and, directly the sails were furled after anchoring, most of the ship's company were sent over the side with brushes and black and white paint. The operation was so well organized, with convenient stages rigged everywhere, etc., that the whole of the ship was painted in half an hour.

On the *Ocean* paying off, Fisher got his reward in the form of the following excellent report from the Admiral Superintendent, Rear-Admiral King-Hall:

SIR,

I deem it my duty to report the very satisfactory manner in which H.M.S. *Ocean* has been stripped and put out of commission, reflecting the greatest credit on Captain Hewitt, Commander Fisher, her officers and men.

The *Ocean* has been alongside the Dockyard Jetty twelve days, affording me full opportunity of witnessing and appreciating the manner in which the work of dismantling was proceeded with.

The crew have shown that whilst in most perfect discipline, they are most contented, active, and cheerful, proving the *Ocean* to fulfil the conditions entitling her to be called a British man-of-war in its most comprehensive meaning.

Whilst it is my duty in justice to the Captain, officers, and crew to bring this before you, I may add it has afforded me very great pleasure to do so.

A very fitting end to an arduous commission.

CHAPTER III

1872—1881

The *Vernon* and torpedo work—The *Vernon* separated from *Excellent*—Thanks of the Admiralty—Fisher's letter to Rev. Mr. Blake—Bermuda—The *Bellerophon*—Examples of humour—Develops mania for dancing—Recollections of him at this time—Navy Club dinner—The *Pallas*—His passage to join her—Dines with the Sultan—Bruges—The *Northampton*—Captain Colomb's lamps—Death of his brother Philip—Appointed to the *Inflexible*—His farewell on leaving the *Northampton*.

CHAP. III — 1872

AFTER the *Ocean* had been paid off, Fisher was appointed once more to the *Excellent*. This time, however, he was placed in charge of torpedo instruction and was not concerned with gunnery work.

He entered on his new work with a vigour which much impressed all who passed through the various courses. These included officers of Post-Captain's rank. One of the Captains who took the course records his surprise at the way Fisher inspired these rather dignified personages, making them pull oars like seamen, and handle the wet cables and heavy chain moorings as if once again they were midshipmen; but all his life he was unique in his power of communicating his own enthusiasm to all around him, whether officers or men. The members of one of the classes were so impressed with the unexpected amount of knowledge that Fisher had succeeded in squeezing into their brains that they proposed to present a bracelet to Mrs. Fisher as a token of their esteem. Fisher, however, would not allow her to accept it, saying that he

had only done his duty and that there was nothing to be particularly grateful for.

For years after an almost superstitious belief in his powers remained among the men, both in the *Excellent* and the *Vernon* Torpedo Schools. As late as 1887 a seaman in an examination paper, answering the rather foolish question, "What is electricity?" wrote: "Electricity is a suttle and impondrus fluid, invented by Captain Fisher and perfected by Captain Wilson" (Fisher's successor). Again, about the same time a gunnery instructor, when asked by a member of his class why the symbol π was valued at 3·14159, at once replied that it was "the most suitable number Captain Fisher could think of."

In 1872 Fisher was sent to Fiume to inspect and purchase a Whitehead torpedo, the first possessed by our Navy. Compared with later developments, this was a very primitive weapon. It had a range of about three hundred yards at a speed of seven knots, and carried an explosive charge of one hundred pounds of gunpowder. Now the range is over ten thousand yards at thirty knots, and the charge several hundred pounds of high explosive.

Fisher's lectures were noted for their humour; he invariably made the driest subject interesting to his listeners. According to his own account, on one occasion he nearly got into trouble when, after explaining to a class of senior officers the construction and theory of the Daniell cell (then the only cell, other than the Leclanché, used for electrical work in the Navy), he promised to show them the true and original one, three thousand years old. In fulfilling his promise, he uncovered a picture on an easel, showing the lions looking at the Daniel of biblical repute!

CHAP. III — 1873

An extract from the diary of Admiral Sir W. Tarleton on the 3rd October, 1873, mentions Fisher and his work :

> Mr. Goschen [1] and Milne left at 10 a.m.[2] I stayed and went on board *Vernon* Torpedo School ship ; at 11 had a most interesting lecture from Commander Fisher, a promising young officer, and witnessed several experiments. The result of my observations was that in my opinion the torpedo had a great future before it, and *that in future mechanical training will be essential for officers.* Made a note to speak to Goschen about young Fisher.

On this extract, underlined and scribbled in pencil by Fisher, is a note : " This is the *Osborne* scheme." The connection between the two will be seen later when his education scheme is discussed.

One ingenious invention, worked out by Fisher and a clever armourer called Isaac Tall, was an electrical apparatus for automatically dropping mines, and also controlling the steering and speed of the steamboat which towed the launch that carried the mines. The invention might have been of value in those early days, when fixed moored mines which were fired by observation from the shore were used to defend harbours ; but, as gun range increased, these fixed mines became useless and the methods used for their destruction also disappeared.

Another old pupil describes Fisher's earnestness, and quotes from an address to his class :

> If you are a gunnery man, you must believe and teach that the world must be saved by gunnery, and will only be saved by gunnery. If you are a torpedo man, you must lecture and teach the same thing about torpedoes. But be in earnest, terribly in earnest. The man who doubts, or who is half-hearted, never does anything

[1] First Lord of the Admiralty.
[2] Admiral Sir Alexander Milne, First Sea Lord.

for himself or his country. You are missionaries; show the earnestness—if need be, the fanaticism of missionaries.

1873-1874

Fisher was very much in earnest about the Torpedo School, and wished to make it not merely a teaching school, but also a school of research. To achieve this, he needed support as well as funds; he therefore invited politicians and journalists down, and gave them a display of all the scientific tricks that the School could produce. But the officers of the old school disliked these shows. One, whose views on the matter were neutral, records: "I remember one officer who came into the wardroom after one of these entertainments and said, 'Is this a blooming circus? When I joined this ship I did not know I was going to Barnum's show!'" This is a small instance of the conflict between the silent and the publicity schools. Later on, Fisher would never have secured the reforms he wanted had he not obtained the support of the Press and Parliament.

On the 20th November, 1873, Fisher put forward a complete scheme of complement for the *Vernon* as separate from the *Excellent*. This was approved in February 1874, but the establishment still remained as part of the *Excellent*.

He was promoted to Post-Captain on the 30th October, 1874, and reappointed in this rank to the *Excellent* for torpedo duties in the *Vernon*.

In January of the following year, however, it was definitely decided to do what he had proposed and separate the two establishments; thus the *Vernon* became an independent command; also it was arranged that Fisher should remain for the time being to lecture to the new Captain, Commander, and officers. He remained accordingly until the end of August 1876,

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1873-1874

when he wrote and reported that he had finished the duties of his appointment, observing :

It is with the deepest regret that I terminate my connection with the Torpedo School. I have done my utmost to develop it, from a conviction that the issue of the next naval war will chiefly depend upon the use that is made of the torpedo, not only in ocean warfare, but for purposes of blockade.

In forwarding this letter, the Captain of the *Excellent* pointed out that there had not been a single accident during Fisher's time in the *Vernon*. Taking into consideration the complete novelty of most of the details of the mining service, such as explosives, fuses, electric batteries, and circuits, it speaks volumes for the care taken by Fisher and his assistants that these first years should have passed without accident. The Admiralty expressed their approval in a Board Minute dated the 4th September, 1876, which stated :

Captain Fisher has done most excellent good service in all matters relating to the starting of the Torpedo School of Instruction, and he has now completed the lecture which was left for him to do when *Vernon* was commissioned. He should be thanked and placed on half-pay at the end of the month, and he should be shortly considered for employment next year.

It is noteworthy that, although Fisher's messmates remark on his various good qualities, none, at this time, mentions the fact that he was more deeply religious than the usual run of naval officer. His religion never seems to have obtruded itself ; it was entirely unostentatious. The following letter, however, shows that it was as firmly rooted and as secure as when he was in the *Ocean* :

23rd October, 1873.

DEAR MR. BLAKE,[1]

I have been screwing up my courage ever since Sunday last to be so presumptuous as to write and thank you for your two

[1] Vicar of St. Jude's, Southsea.

most excellent (of your invariably excellent) sermons of last Sunday. I trust that God may spare you many years to do as much good to others as you have done to me, but please not to think by my writing like this that I am far advanced, or even on to the road, to perfection—my condition is exactly expressed in the *Christian Year*, footnote to third Sunday after Epiphany,[1] but with these differences, that from experience I have got the "particular distrust" and I grieve to say done the "enormous things," so you will heap coals of fire on my head if you ever think, speak of, or write to me as even a mediocre example of Christian life. And now I am going to make so bold as to ask you to lend me those two sermons for a week or ten days with permission to copy them; and will you please distribute the amount of the enclosed cheque (anonymously) as a small thank-offering for the same; and lastly, as a particular favour, I beg of you not to trouble to answer this, or in any way notice that I have written.

Yours most sincerely.

I'm not rich, so don't judge of my gratitude by the cheque.

Fisher did not enjoy life with his family for long; in March 1877 he was appointed Flag-Captain to Admiral Sir Astley Cooper-Key, Commander-in-Chief of the North-west Coast of America, with the *Bellerophon* as flagship.

There is little to record of the work carried out on this station, for the *Bellerophon* was the only large ship there, and consequently little fleet cruising could be done. On the other hand, there was plenty of scope for Fisher's energies in the ship. The senior midshipman[2] thus describes Fisher's début:

When Captain Fisher was appointed to us there was something

[1] This is the footnote referred to: "From the first time that the impression of religion settled deeply on his mind, he used great caution to conceal it, not only in obedience to the rule given by our Saviour of fasting, praying, and giving alms in secret, but from a peculiar distrust he had of himself; for he said he was afraid that he should at some time or other do some enormous thing, which if he were looked on as a very religious man, might cast a reproach on the professing of it and give great advantage to impious men to blaspheme the name of God" (Burnet's *Life of Hale*).

[2] Captain Honner.

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1877-1879

like consternation in the ship, for his reputation as a strict disciplinarian was well known. The state of the ship was undoubtedly slack, as she had been a long time in Dockyard hands, the crew having been housed in a hulk and the officers in barracks. Captain Fisher was not long in letting his opinion be known. He fell the officers and crew in on the quarter-deck; and, having told them what he thought of the want of smartness and proficiency, said: "Now, I intend to give you 'hell' for three months, and if you have not come up to my standard in that time you'll have 'hell' for another three months."

He was as good as his word. We had drills and exercises all the time. The officers were a good lot and the men had also been a picked crew, so they quickly responded to the lead given by the Captain, and in three months the ship was as smart as any in the Service. Then the Captain, with characteristic energy and versatility, threw himself heart and soul into the amusements of the officers and men.

His humour was as great as ever when dealing with awkward disciplinary cases. At Bermuda he received a report from the Captain Superintendent of the Dockyard that two midshipmen had been caught by the police breaking into the Dockyard; and asking that disciplinary steps might be taken. Fisher forwarded the report to the Commander-in-Chief, "regretting extremely that he was obliged to bring to his notice a serious case of probable attempted burglary by two officers of his flagship, whose heights were respectively 4 feet 4 inches and 5 feet, and who had scaled a wall 2 inches higher than the shorter offender. A 90-cwt. anchor was missing from the Dockyard, and a hole had been discovered in the pocket of the elder and most desperate criminal." He concluded by asking what punishment should be meted out. It was very daring of him to forward such a report to the Commander-in-Chief; but, of course, he knew the Admiral well, and without doubt had paved the way verbally before sending forward these remarks.

At Halifax in 1877 Fisher developed his liking for dancing, which soon became almost a mania and lasted up to the year of his death. In this, as in most other matters, he was years in advance of the times; for he had no hesitation, forty years before the war, in selecting and dancing with one single good dancing partner for the greater part of an evening—a proceeding which, at that time, was looked on as horribly compromising to the lady, and little short of scandalous, though now it is almost the ordinary custom. He always took one or more midshipmen with him to a dance, and he would use them as partners if the ladies were inferior dancers. He eventually went so far as to stop the leave of any midshipman who could not dance. This was the origin of what afterwards became the universal practice, that the gunroom officers danced on the quarter-deck while the band was playing during the dinner-time of the wardroom. A gunroom dinner is a short and strictly business function; there are no superfluous courses; there is therefore ample time for dancing when it is over and before the more formal wardroom dinner comes to an end. Many officers have lived to bless this order given by Fisher; for, by having then learned to dance, they have since had many hours of pleasure in varied climes all over the world. It was, however, typical of Fisher that he did not start his dancing habit until he had brought his ship up to the standard of efficiency which he desired.

An officer, who was Fisher's aide-de-camp in the *Bellerophon*,[1] and therefore had an exceptional opportunity to become intimately acquainted with his

[1] Admiral Sir A. H. Gordon Moore, K.C.B.

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Captain in various moods, has given the following description of Fisher at this time:

Fisher was a very exacting master and I had at times long and arduous duties, long hours at the engine-room telegraphs in cold fog, etc., and the least inattention was punished. It was, I think, his way of proving us, for he always rewarded us in some way when an extra hard bit of work was over. He was very kind to the younger midshipmen, and delighted in having hot suppers prepared in his cabin for those midshipmen who had extra cold night watches at sea. He would peep in to see we were well started, and then go away, telling us not to leave until everything was eaten. He could enter into the fun of informality with the youngest, and at a ball at Bermuda given by the Lieutenants of his flagship he was worthily adjudged the winner of the prize for the best "cake-walk" performance; and he duly received the cake. I have seen him persisting to dance when the rain was dripping through the awnings, although his fair partner was hardly enjoying her shower-bath.

He was not a master hand at driving a horse. I have a dim recollection, as a midshipman, of a night drive back from Government House at Jamaica (I generally went with him as A.D.C. to dances), when he and two other Captains, in turn, tried their hands at driving, as the black coachman was half-seas over. It was all right until Fisher decided to act as "Captain of the Fo'sle," as he called it; we then went into the ditch and took some time to get things going again.

When he gave up the command of the *Bellerophon*, he left a good many of his things behind. These he instructed me to auction, which I did. I was to have anything I wished for as my reward for doing auctioneer. I kept his sea-boots, which were far too big for me. Alas! the new Captain forbade midshipmen to wear sea-boots! It was to the sincere regret of all that, on Sir Astley Cooper-Key hauling down his flag, Captain Fisher also went home.

After he left the *Bellerophon* he wrote several times to me, and I know he did the same to other youngsters, just nice encouraging letters, which were really most helpful to us.

An eloquent and facile sketch of Fisher, from the gifted pen of a lady[1] who knew him well, may con-

[1] Mrs. de Crespigny, daughter of Sir Astley Cooper-Key.

clude the brief account of the commission of the *Bellerophon* :

Among the earliest memories I have of early childhood, visits from Lord Fisher—Lieutenant as he was then—intermingle. He was a Lieutenant on board the *Excellent* when my father commanded her, and spent a great deal of his time at our house in the Dockyard. Even in those early days I remember being moved with a feeling of romance about him—I was four or five years old at the time—and that feeling never left me to the end of his life. He was so very much a *sailor* in every meaning of the word—was so essentially a part of the sea and the Navy. His genuine love for both shone out through everything. Then I was probably unconsciously affected by hearing my father's opinion of him often repeated : that he was bound for the " Top," " One of the finest brains in the Navy "—and so on—" with an inexhaustible capacity for hard work." He had a genuine love and admiration for my mother, which he often referred to in after-life.

When he was my father's Flag-Captain on board the *Bellerophon* in 1878 comes my next clear recollection of him. His spirits were inexhaustible, a born optimist in little as well as great things, and he then developed a most extraordinary passion for dancing which I believe he never grew out of. He would come to the schoolroom, or the verandah, or the lawn, it did not matter where, and we would dance for any length of time to his own whistling ! if no better orchestra was available. It grew into a perfect passion and he became a very good dancer. His other great passion, so far as I knew, was for sermons ! He attended morning and evening service mainly for the sermons, which he would discuss afterwards with great animation. He told me later in his life that in London he often went to three services a day, and that one well-known Dean had told him he was in danger of suffering from " spiritual indigestion."

He often made very caustic remarks, and one of his sayings was, " Do right and fear no man. Don't write and fear no woman," but although he was very thorough as an enemy in the big things of life, I never remember hearing him say little uncharitable things about his neighbours. As a friend he was the very best—I speak as I found him—staunch and always ready to help. I know of an instance personally where he extended a helpful hand very much *in spite of his own interests* at the moment. I know that in his

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professional career he made many enemies. He told me himself, just before the war, there was a time at the Admiralty when he had not a friend in the world, and his voice shook with emotion as he said it. During the war, when he was First Sea Lord, he never failed to answer any appeal to him for help in any way which was made to him—a great tribute to his regard to an old friendship that he should willingly give his mind to unimportant affairs at such a time.

The following extract from a letter written by Fisher as far back as 1876, dated from the Admiralty, gives some idea of the opinion of him, then held, by the senior officers of the Service. The Navy Club is a dining club for naval officers, started towards the end of the eighteenth century to enable old shipmates to meet and to commemorate the naval victories of past wars :

I dined at the Navy Club last night. Mr. Smith [1] was so very *empressé* (is that the right word ?) towards me. Admiral Hood came up and said, " Well, you are being buttered down well by everybody."

Admiral Wellesley told me the Admiralty would never give me the cold shoulder, and Codrington said, " You certainly deserve a ship of your own."

And Mr. Smith alluded to me in his speech after dinner, so you may imagine my feelings. I sat next to dear old Shaddy, and he introduced me to all the other Admirals as " his boy," and added in a stage whisper, " the best boy I ever had." Admiral Montgomery was there, also Rowley, looking very fishy about the eyes. Sir Cooper was in the chair and made an awful mess of his speech.

Fisher next spent six months in the *Hercules*, the flagship of Sir A. Cooper-Key in the special service squadron.[2] It was while in this ship that Fisher began his campaign in favour of Sir William Thomson's compass.

On the 1st January, 1879, he was appointed to command the *Pallas* in the Mediterranean. His ship

[1] The Right Hon. W. H. Smith, First Lord of the Admiralty.

[2] Commissioned on account of the Russian war scare.

H.M.S. *FURIOUS* IN THE ICE IN THE GULF OF PECHILI

was in the Sea of Marmora, and a description of how he got up to the Dardanelles to join her is best given in his own words :

I was sent overland at an hour's notice to Malta, where, on entering the harbour, I noticed an old tramp steamer picking up her anchor, and on inquiry found she was going to Constantinople. I went alongside, got up a rope ladder that was hanging over the side, and pulled up my luggage with a rope's end, when the Captain of the tramp came up to me and said, " Hullo ! " I said, " Hullo ! " He said, " What is it you want ? " He didn't know who I was ; I was in plain clothes, just as I had travelled over the Continent, and I replied, " I'm going with you to Constantinople to join my ship," and he said, " There ain't room ; there's only one bunk, and when I ain't in it the Mate is." I said, " All right, I don't want a bunk." And he said, " We ain't got no cook." And I said, " That don't matter either." That man and I, till he died, were like David and Jonathan. He was a magnificent specimen of those splendid men who command our merchant ships. I worshipped the ground he trod on. His Mate was just as good. They kept watch and watch ; it was a hard life. I said to him one day, " Captain, I never see you take sights." " Well," he said, " why should I ? When I leaves one lamp-post I steers for the other " (meaning lighthouse) ; " and," he said, " I trusts my engineer. He gives me the revolutions what the engine has made, and I know exactly where I am. And," he added, " when you've been going twenty years on the same road and no other road you gets to know exactly how to do it."

Fisher arrived at his ship, and was put up by the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Geoffrey Phipps Hornby, in his flagship while his cabin was being painted. The *Pallas* was a rotten old craft, and it is extraordinary that such a vessel should have been in commission so late as 1879. In order to keep her armour-plates from falling off, a chain cable was passed under the bottom to frap them in place ! This recalls St. Paul's perilous journey when they had to undergird the ship to prevent her falling abroad.

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After the Peace Treaty had been signed between Turkey and Russia, Fisher went with the Commander-in-Chief and the other Captains of the Fleet to dine with the Sultan at Constantinople.

I enjoyed my dinner very much. He treated us with great honour. When we arrived at the Palace, we were received by the Grand Vizier, Seraskier, who is Osman Pasha of Plevna, and all the Cabinet Ministers. It was a very imposing sight. After a long time of waitings and mysterious rushings about of black slaves, the Grand Vizier, Osman Pasha, and the Admiral were ushered up into the Sultan's presence. Then we were taken up to the dining-hall and put into our places, and then the Sultan appeared, a little man with a hooked nose, very black beard and whiskers cut close, and looking very delicate and careworn, but with a most sweet smile when he spoke. Namyk Pasha, whom I sat next to, is a very celebrated man who is nearly ninety years old and a great favourite of the Sultan, having been his grandfather's (Sultan Mamout's) favourite A.D.C. He signed the Treaty of Peace with Russia the other day. The Sultan only talks Turkish, and by his side stood the Chief Interpreter, who, when in conversation with the Sultan, bowed nearly to the ground and touched his mouth, his forehead, and his breast with his right hand after each sentence. The strict etiquette is for no one to utter a syllable at the table, and all those Turks hardly kept their eyes off the Sultan the whole of dinner, and the Grand Vizier made just as humble reverences to the Sultan, when spoken to, as the Interpreter. It really was a most interesting sight. The servants trembled, or pretended to do so, when they approached the Sultan with the various dishes of dinner. He spoke very low and softly always, and took all our fancies very much. In the middle of dinner the Sultan rose and proposed all our healths, which was interpreted to us by Mr. Mallet, who is acting for Sir A. Layard, our Ambassador. Then Mr. Mallet proposed the health of the Sultan.

After dinner the Sultan retired to his drawing-room and the Admiral was invited in, with the Grand Vizier and Mr. Mallet, and after a little time we were all sent for and introduced separately to him. Then he made us a little speech and said he could never forget the services rendered to him by the Fleet, and it was a real pleasure to him to have us in his drawing-room, and he begged we would sit down and smoke a cigarette with him, which we did;

and then presently, after some conversation with the Admiral, translated by the Grand Vizier, who also appeared to be trembling, we were bowed out. Then when we got out all the great Pashas came and "kow-towed" to the Grand Vizier, who is a most fascinating man, and came here from Tunis an unknown man; but the Sultan read a book he had written, and thought he must be very clever and sent for him to talk to, and ultimately made him Grand Vizier.

In the morning we went to the Mosque of St. Sophia, which is very wonderful, and said to be far grander than St. Peter's at Rome, but I don't think so.

We are going down to Gallipoli to-night, and leave there for Besika Bay to-morrow morning. The bazaar is wonderful, all roofed in, miles of it, and a dim light and such marvellous queer things, with grand old Turks sitting cross-legged in the middle of their goods smoking away and occasionally looking towards Mecca praying, and the crowds of people in all sorts of colours and dresses. I could fancy myself living in the time of Harun al Raschid. Our tea-cups last night were of solid gold, and also our dessert plates, spoons and forks.

Fisher only stayed in the *Pallas* for six months. He then returned to England. It was about this time that he and his family paid a visit to Bruges. He afterwards wrote:

Ah, that wonderful Madame Polsonare where we lodged! How she did so well care for us! The peas I used to watch her shelling! The three repositories: First, the old ones to be stewed. Second, those for the Polsonare family. Thirdly, the youngest and sweetest of the peas for us her lodgers! And how delicious they were! And how delightful was old "Papa" Polsonare and the daughters so plump and opulent in their charm! And their only son, the "brave Belge!" He was a soldier! What has become of them now? They cared for us as their very own, and charged us the very minimum for our board and lodging! And having nothing but my pay, I was grateful! And the Kindergarten so delightful! The little children all tied together by a rope when they went out walking. Pamela was my youngest daughter. "The last straw" was her nickname! and it was written up over the mantelpiece that it was *défendu* to kiss Pamela! She was about three

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years old, I think, and went to school with a bun, and her books strapped to her back; and, when the Burgomaster gave away the prizes, she was put on a throne to hand them out (dressed as a ballet-dancer)! But, alas! when the moment came she was found to be fast asleep.

On September 25th, 1879, he was appointed Flag-Captain to Sir Leopold M'Clintock, Commander-in-Chief of the North American Station, in the *Northampton*. He wrote afterwards of the Admiral:

He was a splendid man, and his kindness to me is unforgettable. He had gone through great hardships in the Arctic. Once he had not washed for 179 days. He was like a rare old bit of mahogany; and I was told by an admirer of his that, when the thermometer was 70 degrees below zero, he found the ship so stuffy that he slept outside on the ice in his sleeping-bag.

The appointment was a great compliment, because the ship was at the time the last word in cruiser construction. She differed materially from any ship that had been previously built, especially as regards disposition of armour and the extent of her subdivision into watertight compartments.

Admiral Sir George Egerton, then a Lieutenant on board, remarks:

Every sort of up-to-date appliance was fitted to her, and the enormous advance made is well shown by the following list of what at that time were novelties: twin-screws, searchlights, torpedo tubes mounted on the broadside, steam as well as hand steering gear, Sir William Thomson's compass (for trial only), a steam siren, Colomb's candle lanterns for internal lighting, telephones, and Nordenfeldt guns.

Shortly after commissioning, the *Northampton* proceeded for a week's cruise in the Channel for trial of guns and to test the ship under sail. The amount of work put into that week was prodigious: steam trials under steam alone, trials under steam and sail, trials under sail alone, tacking, wearing, making and shortening sail, gun trials, general quarters, night quarters, searchlight tests, and

frequent coaling ship. All hands were employed all day, and each of the night watches was taken up with watch drills, so that when Sunday came, everyone hoped that we were going to have a day's rest. Not a bit of it. At 6 a.m. all plain-sail was made, and the day spent in tacking and wearing the ship, and testing the sailing qualities, except for a lull at 9.30 a.m. for divisions, Captain's inspection, and short prayers. These were followed by reading the Articles of War [Naval Penal Code], finishing up with the reading of forty punishment warrants. The first Article of the Articles of War enjoins that the Sabbath day is to be strictly observed. A brief smile went round when that was solemnly read by the Captain. All, however, was taken in good part, including the warrants. The work may sound severe, but it had its effect throughout the commission, which was a very happy one.

Sir William Thomson came to sea in the ship to try his compass; he was at it from daylight to dark. A Lieutenant was told off to assist him, and a very cold job it was. For three days he failed to adjust it; there was always some error he could not eliminate, and his temper and language went from bad to worse. On the fourth day the Lieutenant observed that the compass card was only marked with 359 instead of 360 degrees, the missing degree having been cut off when the two ends of the paper were joined together. Then Sir William fairly exploded. He was landed at Portland, raced up to Glasgow, slaughtered some one, and came back again with the mistake corrected. The compass was then adjusted and gave no further trouble.

Fisher dearly loved a joke. The ship was fitted with lanterns designed by Captain Philip Colomb, to replace the old archaic fittings which had persisted since Nelson's days. One of the chief points claimed for this particular pattern was that it had a peculiar but simple lock which could not be unlocked without a special key. The lamps were heavy and hung down some distance below the beams. Captain Colomb was instructed to visit the ship to see his lamps in place, and Fisher was determined to drive home to him their weak points. He instructed his coxswain to have his (the coxswain's) knife ground with a square

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end to the blade (for when so fitted it could be used to open the lock of the lamps) and to stand near a particular gun during the inspection. He further had one of the lamps hung just inside his cabin door.

The next day Captain Colomb arrived, and when going through the rather dark and low door into the Captain's cabin, struck his head violently against the lamp that had been hung there by Fisher's orders. "I'm sorry," said Fisher, "but these d——d lamps are always in the way." In due course, as they went round the ship, they encountered the coxswain. "Come here," said Fisher; "what's your name?" —"Henry Hardy, sir," replied the man.—"What are you doing there?"—"Cleaning the gun, sir."—"Got a knife on you?"—"Yes, sir."—"Then go and open that lantern," pointing to one of Colomb's type. The man of course opened it at once. "There, you see," said Fisher, "nice sort of a lock that, Colomb, you've got, opened by a man with his knife." All the way round the ship the faults of the lamp were pointed out: they gave little light, and that light was thrown in the wrong direction. Poor Colomb went ashore very disheartened; but, nevertheless, the lamps were well reported on by Fisher, and later they were adopted for general use in the Navy.

Often on general drill days Fisher would address the men and give them a good dressing-down, but he always ended with something amusing that put them in a good temper. He had a habit of emphasizing his points by holding up his left hand with the fingers and thumb widely extended, and as each point was made he would close a finger with the other hand, finishing off with the hand clenched, and the thumb standing up in the air; they were irreverently christened by

the men "the four bananas and the baby's leg." When he meditated a particularly heavy morning's drill, he used to appear in a very old frock-coat, quite short, light blue and almost faded to green with wear. This was a danger-signal, and the men would nudge one another and whisper, "Look out for squalls." This coat was also usually worn the morning after the men had returned from general leave, when they were still suffering from yesterday's dissipation; for Fisher considered it was then a good thing to have a heavy job to pull the men together again.

On one occasion he played a trick on the Principal Medical Officer of the Naval Hospital at Halifax. This officer sent a note to Fisher, to ask him if he would arrange for some signalmen to be sent to the Hospital with flags to be hoisted rainbow fashion at the mast in the grounds on the Queen's birthday. Fisher was delighted to do this; but, at the same time, he arranged for them all to be either yellow or yellow and black, which signified plague and quarantine. The P.M.O. was furious, and prayed that Fisher might become a patient under his care. This might well have happened at any time, for Fisher was most erratic in his meals and in the rest he took at night. He would dine at any hour between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m., and frequently not at all. On other occasions, more especially when he gave dinner parties, he fed sumptuously and was a most generous host. He used to sit up and work very late; and, not infrequently, at any hour of the night, would send for the gunnery and torpedo Lieutenants to go through a bundle of scraps of paper on which his latest ideas were scribbled, saying that he wanted them put into shape by the morning, so as to leave by that day's mail.

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His second in command was Commander Wilmot Fawkes, who of course saw Fisher at a different angle from all others in the ship. At first he found Fisher difficult; he could not adjust himself to Fisher's lightning methods. In his private letters home he often complains that Fisher "will not stick enough to routine." The two men were temperamentally different, which was probably a good thing for both of them. In one letter he remarks:

> I have never had such a time of it. Captain Kennedy says that anyone serving with Captain Fisher ought to have the temper of an angel and the hide of a rhinoceros, but he is not quite that. I have got on capitally with him, but he makes everything such a rush that one can't do things properly. We had 150 runs with Whitehead torpedoes in the last ten days, and the whole Navy had only 200 last year.

It is not often that a chance is afforded of seeing the private views of two men about each other. The end of the following private letter from Fisher, dated 2nd May, 1880, affords this chance. He was just beginning to study the character of Nelson, who became his idol and on whom he modelled the whole of his after-life:

> I have been reading a Life of Nelson which I have never before heard of, by a Doctor Pettigrew—most interesting. All my spare moments for weeks past I have been reading Nicolas's Letters and Dispatches of Lord Nelson, and I hardly do anything else. I never before realized what a great character was his, and how abominably wrong M. Thiers's estimate was of Nelson—that he was merely a man to fight. In Pettigrew's Life there is a most beautiful engraving of Lady Hamilton. She really must have been a most lovely woman, and it says in this book, from the testimony of Romney, that her figure was as lovely as her face.
>
> I like the new Commander so far very much. He is quiet and very attentive. We all seem such puny, insignificant people after reading of Nelson's times, I quite despise myself.

LIEUTENANT PHILIP FISHER

Drowned at the time of the loss of H.M.S. *Atalanta*

Fisher again shocked the ideas of propriety as extant in 1880, for we read in a letter written by one of his officers :

> The Captain is quite disgraceful. He danced nearly every dance at the General's with one young lady, and every one but two with her last night.

During this commission Fisher's favourite sailor brother Philip was lost in the *Atalanta*, a training-ship for ordinary seamen, which foundered in the vicinity of the West Indies, or somewhere on her passage from there to England. The *Northampton* was one of the ships sent to search for traces of her, but none were forthcoming. This was a great blow, and it took Fisher some considerable time to recover his good spirits. His brother was a splendid young fellow marked for special advancement in the Navy. The manner in which he was appointed to the *Atalanta*, and therefore to his death, is worth recounting.

Philip Fisher had already served in the *Atalanta*, as a Sub-Lieutenant, on a cruise to the West Indies and back ; and, on his return, was appointed to the Royal Yacht—an appointment that carried with it his promotion after a few months of service. On leaving the Yacht, the Captain of the *Atalanta* asked for Philip to be again appointed to her ; but Lord Hood of Avalon, then the First Sea Lord, said that it could not be managed, as he had already appointed Lieutenant Tunnard to the vacancy. Philip then wrote to the Duke of Edinburgh, with whom he had become a great favourite when he had served with him in the *Sultan* ; but the Duke, even, could not persuade the First Sea Lord, whose Flag Lieutenant Tunnard had been. Philip, as a last resource, wrote to one of the ladies-in-waiting, who showed the letter

to Queen Victoria, who also had taken a great fancy to him when he was in the Yacht. The Queen told the lady-in-waiting to inform the First Sea Lord that "it was her wish that Mr. Fisher be appointed to the *Atalanta*." Tunnard's appointment was then cancelled, and Philip appointed. He joined her in the West Indies, and on her way back she disappeared, and nothing more was ever heard of her. So died a most promising officer who apparently had his brother's gift of winning the affection of all with whom he came into contact.

It is impossible to say whether or not he would have developed the same genius for naval matters that Jack Fisher possessed. We are, however, reminded of the saying of a friend who, when Fisher told him that he had been "vetted by a doctor from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, and had been informed that his constitution was so wonderful that he ought to have been twins," remarked, "Thank goodness you were not; one Jack Fisher in the Navy at a time is quite sufficient!"

An extract from a letter written by Commander Fawkes, dated 14th January, 1881, tells of Fisher being appointed to the *Inflexible*:

> Very sad news for the ship, but very good news for Captain Fisher, has just arrived by telegram. He is appointed to the *Inflexible*, the new large ironclad. It is a *very* great compliment to him, as those ships are generally given to men very much senior to him. He is very much flattered and likes the appointment immensely, but he is very sorry to leave the ship, and, as Captain Karslake says, there are nothing but long faces in her. We are all very sorry to lose him.

Admiral Sir Leopold M'Clintock, Fisher's Commander-in-Chief, wrote:

Everyone regrets the departure of Captain Fisher, but I fancy we shall not fully realize our loss until he has gone. . . . Since his nomination to the *Inflexible*, his spirits have returned and daily increased, and now he almost requires wiring down.

Fisher naturally was most anxious to rejoin his family, which was on the Continent, after his absence of nearly a year and a half; but he wisely put the Service first and his own inclinations second. We find him writing on the 15th January:

I suppose I shall, on arrival, go straight to London and then to Portsmouth, and I think I may be able to put in a few days' leave to come over to you; but it isn't a bit of use to decide anything till I get home, for I must be most careful in all I do, because they have paid me a most wonderful compliment, I think, and I am sure to be most awfully envied and watched, so I want to show that I put duty in the first place.

Then a fortnight afterwards Commander Fawkes wrote:

We had a most successful farewell dinner. Captain Fisher's health was received most enthusiastically, and he was very much touched, and made a very nice speech. He said he owed his appointment partly to the officers of this ship, for if everything had not gone so well he would not have got it. I thought it was very nice of him.

When a popular Captain leaves a ship he is usually pulled to the place of embarkation by a crew of ward-room officers. It is always an emotional occasion and one which keeps the recipient of the "send-off," as it is called, on the verge of a breakdown. Fisher could give the officers and men "hell" for three months for the benefit of their souls and bodies; but he could not face the emotion of saying good-bye. As regards the Service his heart was stony; but,

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where the Navy was not concerned, he was remarkably tender-hearted. Two days after Fisher had left the ship, Commander Fawkes wrote :

> Captain Fisher left us on the 29th. He regularly gave us the slip. He went ashore asking for a boat to bring him off at 3 p.m. We had arranged to pull him on board the steamer with an officers' crew at about 4 p.m. I received a note from him from the steamer saying that he hoped we should not be very angry, " but human nature is too weak." I wrote to tell him that a " bear with a sore head " was angelic compared to us, and that we would show him what we felt as he passed. We played his favourite valse, " La Berceuse," and " Old Lang Syne," and cheered him.

Thus was the curtain rung down on Fisher's time as Flag Captain. In future he was always to be either Captain of his own ship or Admiral of his own Fleet.

CHAPTER IV

1881—1882

H.M.S. "INFLEXIBLE"

But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger,
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood.

King Henry V.

Fitting out—The rolling tanks—Sir W. Thomson and the earth-leak—The novel use of a silk dress—Woman after man—Guard-ship to Queen Victoria—The Egyptian War—Bombardment of Alexandria—Fisher landed in charge of Naval Brigade—A narrow escape—Letter from the Queen—The armoured train—Dysentery—Nearly dies—Admiralty concern at his illness—The "de Chair" inquiry—Invalided home—Letter from the ship's company.

FISHER'S service in command of the *Inflexible* marks a considerable step upwards in his career. Though he had earned a great reputation in the Navy, he was not known outside that service; but, by the end of this commission, his name was familiar both at Court and to the general public.

It was a great compliment to him to be appointed to the *Inflexible*, since he was only a junior Captain; but no doubt existed at the Admiralty that he was by far the ablest man on the Captains' list, and was particularly suited to command so important an experimental ship. He himself gives the reason of his appointment in his usual whimsical and exaggerated style:

The Admiralty had for some time considered who was to command the *Inflexible*. As each name was discussed by the Board of

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Admiralty, it got "butted." That is to say, it would be remarked, "Yes, he's a splendid officer and quite fit for it, but——" and then some reason was adduced why he should not be selected. (He had murdered his father, or he had kissed the wrong girl!) Lord Northbrook, who was First Lord, got sick of these interminable discussions as to who should be the Captain of the *Inflexible*; so he unexpectedly said one morning, "Do any of you know a young Captain called Fisher?" And they all, having no notion what was in Lord Northbrook's mind, and I being well known to each of them, had no "buts"! So he got up and said, "Well, that settles it; I'll appoint him Captain of the *Inflexible*." I was about the junior Captain in the biggest ship.

The *Inflexible* was then the last word in battleship design. She had a main armament of two turrets each with two 80-ton muzzle-loading guns, by far the largest that had by that time been mounted in a British ship. She was an improvement on the *Ajax* and the *Agamemnon*, being larger and more heavily armed, and was a contemporary of the two large Italian ships the *Dandolo* and the *Duilio*, which mounted 100-ton guns. She was brig-rigged, which was an absurdity; for it should have been obvious to any seaman or naval architect that she could never manœuvre efficiently under sail. Several years had still to pass before masts and sails came to their slow and lingering death; for, though as a gymnasium they provided excellent exercise for the men, in action they were a great danger, owing to the damage they would cause if they fell on the deck or turrets, and the risk that would be run of fouling the propellers if they and their rigging happened to fall over the ship's side.

Every new device that was available was installed in the ship, including the "Thomson" compass, with which Fisher had identified himself ever since the *Hercules* had commissioned. The story of the

trials and final acceptance of this compass affords a wonderful example of the difficulty of overcoming prejudice. The "Thomson" compass had every good point that a navigator could desire, since it, practically, was free from all the errors that were inherent in the current Admiralty compass; yet the old navigating officers who had the deciding vote, through ignorance, feared the new invention and for some years successfully blocked its introduction.

The only time that Fisher ever appeared as an expert witness was during a suit for infringement of patent regarding this compass. The chief point of interest about Fisher's evidence was the way that he studiously avoided giving any opinion other than that based on his own practical experience of the compass. In vain the opposing counsel tried to lead him on to give an opinion on points of theory or science; and, although Fisher knew practically all that was to be known in this respect, he invariably referred his cross-examiner to Sir William Thomson as the proper person to answer such questions. In the end Sir William won his case.

Another of the novelties in the *Inflexible* was the installation of ballast tanks, which were introduced with the idea of checking the rolling of the ship. There were two of these, one each side of the ship; they were cross-connected with pipes, so that, when the ship rolled, the water in trying to get from one tank into the other lagged behind and so checked the rolling. At least, this is what it was hoped would happen. But in practice it was found that the water did not usually move quickly enough and the roll was frequently augmented rather than reduced. Floats were fitted for the purpose of recording the height of

the water in the tanks, and, to these, recorders were attached which automatically traced diagrams showing the height of the water. Mr. Philip Watts,[1] a brilliant young constructor, accompanied the ship to interpret these records. It was commonly reported that the spiders'-webs of lines that were woven on these diagrams defied deciphering, and nearly landed him in a lunatic asylum! Although the tanks were proved to be useless, it was nevertheless a bold attempt to investigate a complex and intricate problem, and one particularly important in a warship, where a steady gun-platform is so desirable.

When Fisher arrived at Portsmouth to take up his command, he inspected the ship in company with the Admiral Superintendent. He asked for a bridge to be erected forward for navigating purposes; but the Admiral demurred, saying that the ship was in all respects ready for sea. Fisher remarked that he would write a formal letter to the Admiralty asking for its erection; to which the Admiral replied, "I will of course forward your application, but it will be with comments suggesting non-approval." He naturally thought this would end the matter. Not a bit of it! Fisher was by no means easily squashed. The letter was written, and was returned from the Admiralty with the request approved; orders were also given that "all Captain Fisher's requests were to be complied with, and that anything that he considered necessary was to be done." The Admiralty evidently had confidence in his judgment.

Electricity in those days was in its infancy. Internal lighting had not been generally adopted; the

[1] Afterwards Sir Philip Watts, F.R.S., Director of Naval Construction.

Inflexible, however, was so fitted. Searchlights also were installed. The dynamos were of the "alternating current" type with a pressure of 600 volts. It was not appreciated at that time that so high a voltage might be dangerous to human life in the case of a shock being received by a man through an earth-leak. One day the Captain's Coxswain received a nasty shock through touching an arc lamp; and, as Sir William Thomson was on board, Fisher called his attention to what had happened. He visited the place and saw that a small arc had formed between one of the cables and earth. He diagnosed the matter as "a nasty little leak, but not likely to be dangerous to life." Just then the cable slipped through his hand and the bare wire touched his finger. He leapt into the air, and his immediate second diagnosis was "Dangerous, very dangerous to life. I will mention this to the British Association." It was most fortunate that the life of this great scientist was not cut short at that moment; for not long afterwards one of the stokers was, unfortunately, killed by a similar leak. In consequence of this accident a pressure of only 80 volts was used on board men-of-war for many years afterwards.

After her arrival in the Mediterranean the *Inflexible* was sent to one of the principal Italian ports, where she was to meet her rivals, the *Dandolo* and the *Duilio*. As bad luck would have it, during the sea passage the field magnets of one of the dynamos earthed, and there was no spare insulated wire on board wherewith to repair the damage. Fisher was, however, not going to have anything wrong with his ship during this visit, so he issued an edict that the repair was to be made good somehow before the ship arrived in port.

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The torpedo Lieutenant[1] was a man of resource, and, *faute de mieux*, commandeered a silk dress that had been lent by a lady to a junior Lieutenant to wear at a fancy-dress ball, and ruthlessly cut up the material into strips for the purpose of insulating the wire used in the repair. This was one of the rare occasions when a lady's dress has been of any real value to the Navy. It would be interesting to know if the lady received compensation from the Admiralty. At all events, if a claim for compensation had been made, the official correspondence should have made most entertaining reading.

Fisher was rather worried at this time by finding that he had developed symptoms of gout. He at once gave up drinking wine, and first reduced his smoking considerably, and afterwards practically gave it up. His symptoms caused him to dip into medical books, where he came across information regarding the management of children, and advice to give them cod-liver oil. At once, with his usual thoroughness, he wrote home suggesting that his elder daughter, Beatrix, should be fed on this elixir, and even prescribed the amount of the dose, and the number of times it should be administered per diem. Undoubtedly Mrs. Fisher dealt, in a suitable manner, with this incursion into her sphere of action.

One day when at Malta the Captain of another ship came on board with two very pretty nieces and asked to be allowed to go round the ship. Of course Fisher gladly assented. The ladies were so attractive that their escort grew in number, and the girls were eventually, to all intents and purposes, lost in the intricacies of the flats and lower decks. Fisher, rather to his

[1] Commander Edward Lloyd.

chagrin, found himself deserted, so he returned to the upper deck and walked about. After some time the girls reappeared, and before leaving they thanked him charmingly for the good time they had had on board. He replied with grim humour that "he was very glad they had enjoyed themselves; but, while he had been waiting to see his officers once more return to their duty, he had found out how true was the saying, 'After man came woman'; and he noticed that she had been after him ever since."

We have already seen some instances of his methods of conveying a reprimand in such a way that it did not leave a sting. Here is another. One day during practice with a Whitehead torpedo he differed in opinion from the torpedo and gunnery officers regarding the adjustments that should be given to one of those weapons for a particular trial. In the end he reluctantly agreed to their proposal being tried, with the result that the torpedo, when fired, went straight to the bottom and stuck in the mud. He at once sent for his clerk and also the officers; when they were present he turned to the scribe and said, "Write me down a d——d fool for following the advice of these officers." That was all!

It was extraordinary how he could play a practical joke and pass it off as if it were an accident. Sir Beauchamp Seymour, the Commander-in-Chief, had a very high opinion of Fisher; but he had a far higher opinion of his own importance and was also very pompous. The *Inflexible* carried a steam barge with a water-tube boiler; it had a high speed, steered very easily, and could turn on its heel. Fisher persuaded Sir Beauchamp to come for a trip in her. Without any warning, he put the helm hard over when the

boat was travelling at top speed, with the result that the portly Admiral was thrown off his seat into a very undignified position on to the bottom boards of the boat. Fisher, however, handled the situation so adroitly that the Admiral was, in the end, rather pleased than otherwise.

In the early months of 1882 the *Inflexible* was sent to Villefranche harbour as guardship while Queen Victoria was staying at Mentone. He at once became a *persona grata* with the Queen. He had a peculiarly open frankness of manner, a ready fund of humour, and a strong personality which combined to make him irresistible when he desired to please. The Queen had no special regard either for the Navy or for the Admiralty. It was said that she considered she had been slighted when the Admiralty had refused to make the Prince Consort an Admiral of the Fleet. But Fisher soon won her good graces, and also made friends with her entourage on this, his first, introduction to Court circles.

In the spring of the same year trouble broke out in Egypt. The Egyptians, suffering from bad government under the Khedive Tewfik, were driven to revolt, the movement being headed by an officer called Ahmed Arabi, who was mainly a figurehead set up by more able personages who were desirous of keeping in the background. The Khedive made some concessions, but each concession lead to further demands; and so the agitation increased from a mere protest against the Government into hostility to all foreigners. The threatening danger to the lives of the British and French residents brought the fleets of the two countries to the Eastern waters of the Mediterranean. Our Mediterranean Fleet was sent to demonstrate off

H.M.S. *INFLEXIBLE* AT THE BOMBARDMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

From a painting by the Chevalier de Martino

Alexandria; but they were kept some distance away in the offing waiting the turn of events.

As is not uncommon with allied demonstrations, little good was effected by the presence of the fleet. On the 11th June a massacre took place in Alexandria. This led, ultimately, to the bombardment of the forts by the British squadron—a measure that was necessary in order to ensure both their own safety when at anchor and also that of the foreign residents. At that time the dual control of Egypt by France and Great Britain was in force; but as France refused to take part in active operations, this bombardment and the subsequent military measures were undertaken by the British only.

The bombardment was carried out on the 11th July. The *Inflexible* was engaged all day in the manner shown in the following notes, which were made by Fisher shortly after the firing had ceased:

7 *a.m.*—Opened fire on the Fort at El Mex and on the Lighthouse battery (Eunostos point).

7.15.—Both shot and shell from the Lighthouse batteries passing over the ship, principally between the masts, the shells bursting over the ship. The fire from El Mex was not heavy; a few projectiles passed near the ship. A glancing shot hit the port quarter near the waterline, causing a leak in the breadroom above the armoured deck; but the water only came up to the lower tier of bags.

7.45.—A 10-inch Palliser projectile from the 400-pounder gun at the Lighthouse battery killed Mr. Shannon, Carpenter, and severely wounded Lieutenant Jackson, and slightly wounded Mr. Collins, Boatswain, and W. Houghton, R.M.L.I.; at the same time another projectile from this battery passed through the first cutter.

The ship so far had been anchored; and in order to get her broadside on to the batteries Fisher

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had put a spring on to the cable, so that she rode by the cable and the hawser, broadside to the wind or the current.

7.55 *a.m.*—The fire on the ship from Omek-Kubebe Fort and from the Lighthouse batteries becoming accurate, let go the spring, picked up the anchor, and engaged the forts under weigh. The second-class torpedo boat, barge, first cutter, both whalers, and galley severely damaged by the firing. About this time a shrapnel shell from the Lighthouse battery burst over the after-funnel.

12.25 *p.m.*—The Lighthouse batteries being silenced, and the inshore squadron observed to be closing on Omek-Kubebe, the *Inflexible* went to the assistance of the ships engaging Fort Ada. Made very good practice at Fort Ada and the Hospital earthwork, nearest distance about 1,800 yards. Fired 20-pdr. and machine guns. Expended all the 20-pdr. segment shell in the ship on Fort Ada and the Hospital earthwork.

1.35.—Fort Ada blew up. Engaged Pharos and Hospital earthwork, which latter battery annoyed us a good deal, the projectiles passing over and all round the ship. The chain slings of the main yard shot away, also the jeers and all other ropes. Eleven shells from Fort Ada passed over just clear of fore-topsail yard; fortunately the shrapnel burst almost directly over the ship, so they did no damage.

2.30.—Having silenced the Hospital earthwork, kept our whole fire on Fort Pharos, 1,900 yards distant. Our fore turret dismounted the gun which had our range. After this Fort Pharos discontinued firing at us. Observed the guns remanned at Hospital earthwork, so recommenced the fire at them until they were again deserted.

5.0.—All the forts on the Ras-el-Tin Peninsula and on the southern shore of the harbour appearing to be silenced, proceeded towards the New Port to engage the forts on the western shore in compliance with signal.

5.15.—General signal to discontinue the engagement. Closed on the senior officer.

6.40.—Anchored off the Lighthouse batteries. Fort Eunostos bearing east 3,000 yards. Worked the electric light on the batteries during the night in accordance with signal.

12*th July*. 9.15.—Weighed in company with *Téméraire* and reconnoitred the Forts on the Ras-el-Tin Peninsula. Observed the guns on Hospital earthwork being replaced, and a body of men

working in rear, and small bodies of men going towards the Light-house fort. Opened fire on the Hospital earthwork in company with *Téméraire* by signal from the Commander-in-Chief. After the fourth round from the 80-ton guns, the men deserted the Hospital earthwork and nothing more could be seen of any men moving in the other forts.

11.10.—Returned to the anchorage.

The shell which so unfortunately killed the carpenter entered the ship aft, below the upper deck, and in doing so was turned completely round, so that it continued its journey base first. It then met the " bitts " round which the cable was secured, and its base stamped the word " Palliser " (which was cast on the base) in reverse on them ; after which it continued on its way. One day shortly after the bombardment, an American officer was shown round the ship, as he wished to inspect the damage that had been done. When they arrived at the bitts, his cicerone explained how the word " Palliser " had come to be stamped, adding, " If I had not seen it myself, I should not have believed it possible." The American, with scrupulous politeness, replied, " Then, sir, perhaps you will allow me the same privilege."

The bombardment of the forts was entirely successful ; but this blow at local authority was succeeded by a state of anarchy in the town. In all the Eastern Mediterranean towns there is a considerable population of the riff-raff of humanity, which is kept in more or less order by the strong hand of repression ; but when once authority is lessened, then looting and massacres commence.

On the third day after the bombardment, sailors and marines had to be landed, both to preserve order in the town and also to protect it against the troops

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of Arabi Pasha. Fisher was selected to command this force, and there was no doubt he was by far the most capable person for the work. He, however, nearly lost his life on the very first night that he took up the command. The incident has been thus related by the Sub-Lieutenant[1] of one of the outposts:

> About 1 a.m. Captain Fisher proceeded to inspect our outposts beyond the Maharun Bay Gate. He arrived without warning, and so suddenly that one of the gun's crew fired at him with a revolver. I knocked up the man's arm and the bullet went over Fisher's head. He took no notice of the occurrence, but merely inspected the gun, etc. He then told the officer to expect an advance of a large number of Arabi's followers during the night, and that the post must be held at all costs, remarking, finally, in a jocular way, "You can't miss 'em. You've only got to put in the ammunition and off it goes." Then he disappeared as silently as he came.

One of the first of Fisher's activities after landing was the construction and equipment of an armoured train for reconnaissance purposes. It was the first time that such a substitute for Cavalry had been suggested. It consisted merely of an ordinary locomotive with several trucks, the men in the trucks and the vital parts of the engine being protected by ordinary boiler-plates. It afforded bullet-proof protection to a reconnoitring party.[2] Fisher mentions in one of his letters that subsequently a gun was also mounted on the train. The idea of an armoured train tickled the fancy of the people in England; and for years afterwards Fisher was chiefly known by his association with this invention.

[1] Now Admiral A. E. A. Grant, C.M.G.

[2] The train operated daily, and Fisher usually accompanied it when his other multifarious duties permitted him to do so. What the general run of these duties was can be gathered from the following letters.

He was much amused, a few weeks after the train had been in operation, to receive a letter from a contractor in the United States offering to construct a more efficient train for 20 per cent. less cost! The train was the inspiration of the moment, and had to be constructed out of whatever material was at hand. The kind offer from America was not received until the train was of no further service.

On 18th July he writes:

I am installed in regal state as Governor of Alexandria, and I have been in command of nearly 4,000 sailors and marines the last few days, expecting every moment an attack by Arabi and the Bedouins; but it passed off.

Some of Fisher's troubles are mentioned in the two following letters:

From ALEXANDRIA.
20th July, 1882.

Where to begin I don't know, for the last [period of] ten days appears to have a whole life in it. The bombardment was on the 11th, and I landed on the 14th to take possession of the forts and city, and the two following days were the most anxious ones I have ever spent in my life, as our force was quite inadequate; none of us slept a wink for three days and were regularly done up when the General (Sir A. Alison) arrived with his troops. As it turns out, I believe our preparations and activities kept Arabi from attacking us, as he made certain we had a much larger force at our command. I have now command of the city and of the sea-forts of Alexandria, and I have also charge of the Khedive and am responsible for his safety; and that is why I am living at Ras-el-Tin with my headquarters here. The Admiral has been most wonderfully kind to me; and I fear it may cause great envy [by] the junior Captain being given the best berth of all; but I must endeavour to deserve his partiality.

I don't believe there will be any more fighting, as the Government don't seem to want it. . . . We must not fail to be most thankful to God for His great mercy, as I had some most narrow escapes. I don't know what sort of an account of the affair will get home; but it was a most successful business from beginning to end.

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4th August, 1882.

I think that I have half an hour now in which to write to you, but it is quite likely that in five minutes I may have to be off again somewhere, and I also find it is so very difficult to sit down to write, as I am perpetually thinking of something else. I am so glad to think that you have been at Southsea and not at Bruges, or even anywhere else in England, for nowhere else would you have heard all the news as you did at Portsmouth.

Last night it was supposed to be quite settled that Arabi would have attacked Alexandria ; but nothing happened, and I can't imagine his being so stupid as to attempt it. I am back in my old quarters at the Khedive's Hareem, a magnificent room, three large windows on three sides of it. Very cool and pleasant. But it's a mass of fleas and dirt ; the dirt of ages.

The General (Sir Archibald Alison) is a very nice man. At four to-day I am going to take him in our train to the Inex lines, which are at the opposite side of Alexandria to Arabi, but he has a lot of Bedouins out there. It's very hot here now, but cooler where I am now than if I were living on board. Our difficulty now will be water, which we shall have to get from the ships. I have some letters unopened which came the mail before last. I won't forget to send you the letter from Captain Bigge, with the Queen's message ; but I must have it copied out first, so that the men may see it. The flies are such a pest here, they won't leave you even when you hit them ; but the fleas and other animals are the real plagues.

Wilson [1] of the *Hecla* is a good deal with me, which is a great pleasure ; he has had great success mounting a gun on our train. We are going to try and experiment with it this afternoon.

The following is the communication from Captain Bigge, Queen Victoria's private secretary, mentioned in the above letter :

WINDSOR CASTLE.
July 1882.

MY DEAR FISHER,

Though the Queen has already through the Admiralty conveyed her thanks and congratulations to the Fleet at Alexandria, Her Majesty desires me to assure you of the extreme interest with which she has followed the movements of the *Inflexible* during recent

[1] Afterwards Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Wilson, V.C., G.C.B.

times, and, in Her Majesty's name, heartily to congratulate you, your officers and men on the successful issue of your action on the 11th.

The Queen at the same time is grieved to hear of the losses you have sustained in Lieutenant Jackson and the Ship's Carpenter. Her Majesty had hoped by the telegrams that Mr. Jackson was progressing favourably.

During Her Majesty's stay at Mentone the Carpenter visited more than once the chalet, and was a general favourite among the Queen's servants, who are shocked to hear that he is killed.

The Queen little thought how soon the splendid guardship at Mentone would be actively engaged, and trusts that the capabilities of the vessel have proved themselves equal to your expectations.

May I also offer my sincere congratulations?

I remain, yours very sincerely,

ARTHUR BIGGE.

The above was accompanied by this covering letter from Sir Arthur Bigge:

MY DEAR FISHER,

It is with the greatest pleasure that I carry out the Queen's desire.

H.M. spoke with particular warmth about you and your splendid ship, and I trust I have adequately expressed her gracious message.

Always yours.

How we longed to see the effect of your fire!

Fisher's work ashore was thoroughly appreciated. Major-General Sir Archibald Alison wrote to him: "You and your train are activity itself. No light cavalry can equal you for reconnaissance duty."

Again Sir Auckland Colvin wrote to a friend:

Captain Fisher did wonders. I do not know what we should have done without him. It was marvellous the way he managed when Alexandria was handed over to him; he made order and regularity everywhere, where everything before was chaos and confusion.

Fisher wrote on 31st July from *H.M.S. Helicon*, lying in the harbour at Alexandria :

> Last night was the first night I have really had a good sleep since 10th July, and I enjoyed it immensely. The night before last the Khedive sent for me, hearing I was giving up the command, to say good-bye. I sat with him nearly an hour ; he is a nice man and a perfect gentleman. He has only one wife, does not either smoke or drink, and is not known to have a fault. He was very complimentary and pleasant. The Admiral is very kind to me ; in fact, I am afraid there will soon be envy and jealousy at my always being kept in here while the other swells are outside in their ships.
>
> *14th August.*
>
> I gave up the Naval Brigade to-day, and am now on board the *Tamar*. The Admiral will not let me yet go off to the *Inflexible*. He told me confidentially that he was going to have me round at Port Said when he is ordered to go himself.

The Naval Brigade were re-embarked on the 11th August, but Fisher was kept by Sir Beauchamp Seymour on board the *Helicon* for some time, so as to profit by his general knowledge of gunnery in its several branches. Eventually, however, he returned to the *Inflexible*.

On 22nd August he had a sharp attack of dysentery. On 29th August he wrote :

> I took 8 pills of ipecacuanha and opium every four hours for two days. The proper dose is one pill a day. But Sedgewick,[1] having had great experience of dysentery in the East Indies and China, has learned by experience that the way to cure dysentery is to poison it with ipecacuanha. The remedy was fifty times worse than the disease ; the sickness was simply indescribable.

Fisher's successor in command of the armoured train [2] was wounded and had to have a foot amputated. This was reported in the papers without the name of

[1] The Fleet Surgeon of the *Inflexible*.
[2] Commander Purvis.

the officer being stated; with the result that the rumour went round that it was Fisher who had been wounded. Queen Victoria as well as many others expressed their solicitude. Considerable relief was felt when it was discovered that the accident had not occurred to Fisher.

Some years afterwards, when Fisher left the Admiralty, an old shipmate[1] wrote from St. Giles's Workhouse:

> I landed with the R.M.A. battalion at Alexandria about twenty-seven years ago, two days after the bombardment, and was one of the number in the train that you had armoured by your artificers, and placed one of your guns on a low-sided truck on front of engine; the rails having been removed, we [detrained] near Mahalla Junction; after piling arms I stood against the truck. You, Sir John, sent some bluejackets with some surveying chain to draw the attention of the enemy, which ruse succeeded; a shell came over the truck but did not burst; you, sir, at once laid the gun and sent one right home with good effect. We then advanced and at dusk returned to Alexandria with General Alison and prisoners and wounded.
>
> And upon your retirement, Sir John, I as a humble person consider poor old John Bull will receive a sad blow on his right arm [the Navy].

His dysentery got worse.

It is only necessary to read the letters written at that time to appreciate how great his reputation in the Navy had become, and how anxious the Admiralty were regarding his health. The First Lord, Lord Northbrook, wrote to him to tell him to come home, remarking, "We can get many *Inflexibles*, but only one Jack Fisher." He was offered leave to go home to recoup his strength, but he absolutely refused. Afterwards, writing to his wife, he pointed out that it

[1] Mr. George Sharp.

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would be too expensive, and he dared not risk losing his ship. He was a poor man with a family; he was also giving his mother an allowance, and the passage-money home and out again would have badly strained his finances. At the end of June in this year his balance at his bankers was under £50. Of course he would not plead poverty to the Admiralty; and, even if the Board had divined his reason for not taking a rest, the fear of creating a precedent would have prevented the Accountant-General of the Navy from paying £50 or so for his passage; thus, although he was "worth more to the Navy than several *Inflexibles*," he got rapidly worse, and nearly died for the matter of some £50 sterling of public money.

The *Inflexible* left for Malta as soon as she could be spared. While there, Fisher held an inquiry into the capture and treatment of Midshipman Dudley de Chair.[1]

Shortly after the Naval Brigade had been landed at Alexandria, this boy mistook the road on his return from an outpost and walked into Arabi's lines. He was made a prisoner and for some time considerable anxiety was felt for his safety. Arabi Pasha, however, treated him very well; in fact, he saved the boy's life, as Toulba Pasha and the Bedouins wished to kill him. He was housed in the Palace at Cairo, where he met and made friends with Arabi's daughter, with whom, apparently, he had a little harmless flirtation; this, however, was only to be expected of a British midshipman. The rapid advance of the Cavalry Brigade into Cairo, after the battle of Tel-el-Kebir, undoubtedly saved his life. As a matter of fact, so rapid was their advance that it was the Cavalry which brought into the town the first news that a battle had been fought.

[1] Now Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair, K.C.B.

The chief point of interest that came out at the inquiry was that Arabi questioned Mr. de Chair on the subject of the strength of our Fleet, and suchlike details. These questions he refused to answer. Arabi merely replied that it did not matter, and pulled out from his pocket a copy of *The Times*, which had in it all the information for which he had been asking.

Fisher hung on hoping to get better; but, at last, he had to be invalided; and, as it was not expected that he would reach England alive, the Fleet-Surgeon of the *Inflexible*, who had been attending him, was sent home with him. Fisher in his *Memories* thus describes the course of his illness:

I kept on being ill from the effects of the dysentery a long time, but Lord Northbrook never let go of my hand. When all the doctors failed to cure me, I accidentally came across a lovely partner I used to waltz with, who begged me to go to Marienbad in Bohemia. I did so, and in three weeks I was in robust health. It was the pool of Bethesda, and this waltzing angel put me into it, for it really was a miracle, and I never had a recurrence of my illness.

So his past dancing stood him in good stead on this occasion.

An echo of his time in the *Inflexible* is also worth recording, as it was the first of the two occasions on which he met and spoke to Mr. Gladstone. The difference in crispness of style of the two men in conversation is most marked.[1]

At an evening party given by Lord Northbrook, Mr. Gladstone was present, and Lord Northbrook took Fisher up to Mr. Gladstone and said, "I want to introduce you to Captain Fisher, who commanded the *Inflexible*, our biggest battleship with 24 inches of armour and four 80-ton guns." Mr. Gladstone, looking at Captain Fisher, said slowly, "Portentous weapons! I really wonder the

[1] This interview was witnessed by the late Rear-Admiral Sir Sydney Eardley-Wilmot.

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human mind can bear such a responsibility." "Oh, sir," said Captain Fisher in his jocular way, "the common vulgar mind doesn't feel that sort of thing." At the compliment so implied the old statesman's features relaxed into a grim smile.

After leaving the *Inflexible,* Fisher received the following letter from the ship's company. It is very rare that a letter of this nature is written, and this one shows conclusively the respect and affection with which he was regarded by his men :

H.M.S. "INFLEXIBLE."
27th August, 1882.

SIR,

We, the ship's company of H.M.S. *Inflexible,* take the earliest opportunity of expressing to you our deep sorrow and sympathy on this sad occasion of your sickness, and it is our whole wish that you may speedily recover and be amongst us again, who are so proud to be serving under you. Sir, we are all aware of the responsible duties you had to perform, and the great number of men you had to see to during your long stay on shore at Alexandria, which must have brought the strongest to a bed of sickness ; but we trust shortly to see you again amongst us and on the field of active service, where you are as much at home as on your own grand ship, and at the end may you receive your share of rewards and laurels, and your ship's company will then feel as proud and prouder than if it was bestowed on themselves.

Sir, trusting that you will overlook the liberty we have taken in sending this to you,

We beg to remain,
Your faithful and sympathizing ship's company,
INFLEXIBLES.

This letter Fisher afterwards characterized as "one of his most cherished possessions."

CHAPTER V

1883—1899

They are happie men whose Natures sort with their vocations.—BACON'S ESSAYS.

The *Excellent*—Stay at Osborne—Two anecdotes—The forty years' routine—Origin of Whale Island—Director of Naval Ordnance and Torpedoes—Naval ordnance and ordnance stores turned over to the Admiralty—A recording angel—His visit to Marienbad—Mrs. F——'s secret—Admiral Superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard—Quickens up shipbuilding—The sedentary Constructor—Controller of the Navy—Water-tube boilers—Parliamentary interference—Committee appointed—The harm done by it—Destroyers—Mr. Yarrow and the Admiralty—The 1893-4 Estimates—Sir F. Richards and the cabmen—Mr. Gladstone's resignation—The *Renown*—Fisher's kindness to midshipmen—Dispositions during Fashoda crisis—The Dreyfus plot—At The Hague Conference—His ideas regarding war.

FISHER, on his return from the Mediterranean, had to lie up for some weeks in order to recover from his illness. As soon as he was sufficiently well, Queen Victoria invited him to Osborne House to dine and stay the night. He was most cordially received, and every succeeding year the Queen invited him to pay her a visit.

At dinner on the occasion of his first visit he sat next to Lady Ely. While he was in conversation with her, the Queen saw her laugh, and at once asked Fisher to repeat the joke. Now, the subject of one's "tummy" was hardly one likely to meet with favour when discussed at Queen Victoria's dinner-table; but Fisher, nothing abashed, and with that peculiarly

CHAP. V 1883

frank method of address which avoided giving any offence, whatever he might say, replied, " I was telling Lady Ely, Ma'am, that I had enough flannel round my tummy to go all round this room ! " at which the Queen joined in the laugh also. This disarming style of reply was one of Fisher's characteristics.

When at dinner at Karlsbad, King Edward observing Fisher in close conversation with a lady, leaned across the table and said to her, " You had better be careful of these sailors, you know the saying that they have a wife in every port." Fisher without the slightest hesitation replied, " Wouldn't you, Sir, have loved to be a sailor ! " The King for a moment looked severe ; and then broke out into an honest laugh. But it was not everyone who could have said the same thing without giving mortal offence.

As soon as he was reasonably fit, Fisher was appointed Captain of the *Excellent*. Here again he applied the broom. What was called the " forty years' routine " was in full swing ; practically nothing had been altered for forty years, since the *Excellent* had been made the Gunnery School. All the firing practices were carried out with old smooth-bore guns. The establishment was crowded with " dead-heads," i.e. pensioners who occupied accommodation to the exclusion of active-service ratings, who should have been there for training. All the gunnery methods were antiquated ; the whole place was in a state of Rip-van-Winkleism.

The " forty years' routine " was knocked on the head ; the pensioners were sent away, and active-service ratings received instead ; quick-firing modern guns replaced the antiquated smooth bores. All this

was effected against considerable opposition, and at the time created a good deal of unpopularity for Fisher, who, although in bad health, by his tenacity carried the reforms through.

His official house was in the Dockyard, but he was frequently on board before 8 o'clock in the morning.

It was during his term in the *Excellent* that the first seeds were sown which led to the building of the Gunnery Barracks on Whale Island. The design originated in a rough sketch made by Lieutenant Percy Scott,[1] which Fisher seized on and elaborated. The island was then the dumping-ground for the mud from the excavations of the extension works in Portsmouth Dockyard, and it grew considerably in size from the soil so received. There were only two buildings on it, one called "the house that Jack built," which was a wooden shack originally built by Fisher when he was on the staff of the *Excellent*, the other the cottage for the gunner in charge. Now it is a series of well-arranged barracks, batteries, drill and recreation grounds.

Admiral Sir George Ommanney Wills, the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, was an old commanding officer under whom Fisher had served. One day Fisher was talking to the Admiral, who was one of the toughest "nuts" that the Navy had had to crack for the previous thirty years. "Fisher," said the Admiral, "you and Clayton were both with me years ago; how is it you look so young while Clayton looks so old?" Without a moment's hesitation came Fisher's answer: "Oh, don't you know why that is, sir? Clayton was with you for two years; I was only with you for two months."

[1] Afterwards Admiral Sir Percy Scott, K.C.B., of gunnery fame.

CHAP. V 1886-1899

On the 1st November, 1886, Fisher was appointed Director of Naval Ordnance, which title he soon arranged should be augmented by the words "and Torpedoes," thus bringing the control of all classes of armament under one head.

One of the first matters he tackled was that of the supply of ordnance and ordnance stores for the Navy, regarding which an almost incredible chaos then existed.

The supply of the Navy with guns and powder had a long history behind it. In the reign of Henry VIII an official called "the Master of Ordnance" supplied munitions, such as they then were, to both the sea and the land forces. He was head of "the Board of Ordnance," which had been instituted by the Navy. Hence in reality the Navy, then, was responsible for the supply of guns to the Army. As the work grew in connection with the manufacture of guns, this Board was represented by a politician designated "Master-General of the Ordnance"—an official of considerable power, who had a seat in the Cabinet. It has been frequently said that, before the War Office took over the Department of the Master-General of the Ordnance, it was the only one which never failed the nation in times of war. The shortage of ammunition at the time of the Armada may be traced more to the parsimony of Queen Elizabeth than to the fault of the Master-General of the Ordnance. In all other wars the Ordnance Department managed to come through without blame.

After the Crimean War, the War Office took over the duties of supplying ordnance to both the Army and the Navy. In 1858 the Admiralty began to view with apprehension the possibilities that might arise in

war through not having control of its own ammunition. The guns of the Navy were beginning to differ in design from those in the Army; in fact, naval gunnery was outstripping the same science in the Army. A considerable delay had arisen in the supply of guns for the *Hercules*, and the Admiralty saw that their hands were completely tied in the matter of arming new ships, by the fact that the money for the supply of new guns, and for all the ammunition, was included in the Army Estimates, and not in those of the Navy. The Department that held the purse-strings dominated the situation. The War Office, moreover, had a most disconcerting habit of paying no attention to Admiralty demands for armaments, but including in their Estimates merely whatever sum they considered to be convenient. The mean yearly difference between the sums asked for by the Admiralty and those put forward by the War Office to the Treasury, in respect of naval supplies, amounted, in the Estimates of 1881–2 to 1886–7 inclusive, to £637,000, or just two-thirds of the sum asked for. Moreover, except in the case of the reserves that were stored on foreign stations, the Admiralty were kept in total ignorance of the number of rounds of ammunition available for the various types of guns. The home reserves of ammunition for the Army and the Navy were pooled, and hopelessly muddled up together. No account was rendered to the Admiralty of the sums actually spent on naval guns and material, and no distinction was made, or kept, between Navy and Army expenditure. It was perfectly clear that when war was declared the Army would be served first, and the Navy would have to be content with whatever was left over.

CHAP. V
1886-1889

Here was an opening for a crusade dear to Fisher's heart. The inter-departmental Committee which had sat in 1886 had recommended that the custody of naval war stores should be transferred to the Navy, and that the Navy should be made responsible for the design and patterns of their own ordnance. Fisher took care that this should not remain a dead letter. After Treasury approval had been obtained, immediate steps were taken to give effect to the recommendations of this Committee. It was perhaps the strongest point in Fisher's character as an administrator that he never allowed decisions to be shelved; he always insisted on instant action being taken. In dealing with the War Office, this was no easy matter. That Department used blocking tactics whenever reform was mentioned. In fact, as we shall see later, the word "reform" to the War Office was as great an anathema as holy water is supposed to be to the devil.

An officer, writing after Fisher's death on the subject of ammunition supply before Fisher took the matter in hand, gives good evidence of the necessity for the change:

> It must be said that Fisher had justification for earnestness. It is difficult to realize now how low our material had fallen. I had a few years before been employed slave-cruising on the east coast of Africa. The cartridges supplied for revolvers often would not go off, and if they did they burnt like squibs. Our provisions were almost uneatable, and, owing to the pig-headed obstinacy of an Artillery General, the Navy, at that time and for many years afterwards, was armed with inefficient, inaccurate, and dangerous muzzle-loading guns, while every continental nation had breech loaders. Nothing but an earthquake or a torpedo would disturb the equanimity of the Artillery General.

During the time that the matter was under discus-

sion, Fisher was much to the fore. The War Office representative of the Ordnance Department was a brother-in-law of Lord Salisbury, then the Prime Minister. In this way Fisher came under the notice of the Premier, who formed a high opinion of his capacity, more especially as an able and stubborn committee-man ; this, as we shall see, had an important outcome later on. Throughout his life Fisher was, by his independent and frank nature, unconsciously casting on the waters bread which frequently returned in unexpected ways.

It was of course unavoidable that some time should elapse before the complete transfer of the ordnance stores could be effected, and it was not till three years later that the First Lord was able to report to Parliament that the transfer had been completed.

At the same time that the stores were taken over, another point of great value was conceded, viz. that the Admiralty became responsible for the design of its own ordnance. This at once allowed the design for armament of our ships to shoot ahead, the Navy being no longer tied down by the erroneous conceptions of the Army regarding naval requirements. Thus Fisher, by compelling action on Committee Reports (a rank heresy in official departmental procedure), laid the foundations for the complete control of the Navy of its own ordnance supplies. A considerable amount more, however, had yet to be done. Equal representation on the Ordnance Committee, the creation of a naval Inspection Corps to examine, pass, or condemn naval guns and ammunition, and finally the issue of tenders, and the regulation of contracts by the Admiralty for all ordnance details—all these had yet to come.

In 1900 the Admiralty raised the question of the relative priority of work on Admiralty and War Office contracts. Apparently it was not uncommon for naval contracts to be shelved, and for preference to be given to Army orders. It was pointed out by responsible officials within the War Office that, in the event of large naval and military operations being carried out at the same time, a breakdown both in the Department of the Director-General of Ordnance and in that of the Army Contracts would inevitably occur, and the suggestion was made, both by the Admiralty and War Office, that the Navy should become responsible for its own inspection and contracting.

The Secretary of State for War, however, decided that there should be a provisional arrangement, and that the matter should be considered further later on. A good example of political procrastination.

In spite of the system being acknowledged by both the War Office and the Admiralty to be a grave danger in war-time, the entire separation of the Navy from the Army as regards ordnance stores did not finally take place till 1909. Had it not been for Fisher's original campaign and his subsequent insistent backing while First Sea Lord, the Great War, as far as the Navy was concerned, would have been a time of grave disaster and acrimonious recrimination.

Both while Captain of the *Excellent* and Director of Naval Ordnance and Torpedoes, Fisher whole-heartedly tackled the question of the improvement of gun mountings and the provision of quick-firing guns. Mr. Josiah Vavasseur, then one of the leading Directors of Messrs. Armstrong, Whitworth & Co., had invented a device for absorbing the energy of recoil of a gun that went a long way towards revolutionizing gun-

mounting design. He frequently met Fisher, and the two formed a friendship which was destined to last for many years. He also became attached to Fisher's children, who frequently stayed with him at Kilverstone Hall, his place in Norfolk. Cecil Fisher, John Fisher's only son,[1] became a special favourite; so much so that, as Mr. Vavasseur had no children, he in 1903 adopted him as his heir, and eventually left him the house and property. Again a crust of bread which returned after many years, not to Fisher, but to his family.

Here may be set down an amusing tale that Fisher used to tell against himself. The exact time of the occurrence is doubtful; but that does not matter. He had some business to transact at the Admiralty, and the one important person with whom the decision lay was a very clever civilian, a Mr. X, who, queerly enough, was deaf and dumb. Fisher went to interview him, full of confidence. The conversation was carried on by means of writing on slips of paper. Question and answer passed, and all seemed to be going well, when Mr. X hunted back through his slips and produced one of Fisher's early answers, which he placed beside the latest reply. The two were mutually destructive. There was nothing more to be said; so Fisher left, with a profound dislike for methods only comparable with those of the Recording Angel!

In August 1889 Fisher went to Marienbad to recoup. Here is a typical letter describing his journey:

When we got to Dover, I sent you a telegram to say the sea was smooth and it certainly looked so; but I felt uncomfortable and went and lay down as soon as we got outside. There was only one person seasick that I saw, a little boy going back to school. I do

[1] The present 2nd Baron.

CHAP. V

1889-1890

hope you had a good passage. We were an hour late, although we had a fair wind and one of the new steamers! Wild horses will never drag me by the Ostend route again.

I had a charming fellow-passenger to Cologne, an old German, a business man who had lived thirty years in England and loved England and hopes to die there. He was very like Auguste's father on the Riga, that old Frenchman who used to look after his children so delightfully. My old German told me he always came by the Ostend route because of the associations. He had come by it as a bachelor, then in love, then with his dear wife, and now he was a widower two years; and he was silent and tears came in his eyes, poor old fellow; but he soon recovered, and talked away again the whole way. He explained to me his hair was white through travelling in trains all night and working hard all day at his business; and he said that while his rivals lay in bed in the morning he was forestalling them all by being at work at 7 a.m.; and so he made his money. He was going on a visit to his dear married daughter at Homburg, but his son was the clever one—such a son!

He was very kind to me at Cologne, trying to get my box, but the officials were inexorable, and it wanted only four minutes to the train starting. He said, "Jump over the barrier and drag your box out." I did! Great sensation! I unlocked it and seized the head custom official by the arm and said "Nix," and dragged it along towards the registration place, where they were most helpful and ran with it to the train, and I after it, and got into the train one minute before it moved out of the station exact to its time. Luckily my old German persuaded me to have coffee and roast chicken and green peas at Verniers, otherwise I had meant to have had supper at Cologne. He told me always to have "Erdbeerenbol" (strawberries floating in white wine cup) at Aix-la-Chapelle, as the place is celebrated for it (but not at night, as it was bad for the stomach at night).

Mrs. F—— is not coming this year; she has found a secret for preserving her figure without it. You soak a towel in soda and water, wring it out dry, and wrap it round your "tummy," and it is unfailing. It brings you down. I will inquire further about this. I had my wine-glass this morning of Kreuzbrünnen and the water has not lost its chief characteristic. The whole town is now lit with electric light, and a beautiful large open building on the promenade, instead of the old smelly place that people walked

in when it was wet. I had my breakfast at the dear old Dianahof. Both Mädchen welcomed me most cordially. The breakfast cost five and a half pence. The little beer-boy has grown tremendous. I have taken rooms for all of us next year. We should arrive on the 15th of August, having visited Antwerp, The Hague, Cologne, the Rhine and Nuremberg on the way, leaving home on the 5th of August. Now I must leave off, as it is dinner-time.

My very fondest love to you all. I do so wish you were all here. The weather is simply delicious and the air like champagne, the woods smelling so lovely of pine and the foot-paths as soft as velvet. It's Paradise, but Eve is absent!

On the 2nd August, 1890, Fisher was promoted to Rear-Admiral. This was, of course, an entirely routine promotion, which came to him automatically on arriving at the top of the Captains' list. In May of the following year he was appointed Admiral Superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard.

An Admiral Superintendent of a Dockyard had hitherto found but little scope for initiating reforms. Dockyards were old-established concerns governed by routine and precedent. Most of the men were "established" men, that is, men who remained permanent workers so long as they behaved themselves. The words "Dockyard matey" were, to the ordinary naval officer, the synonym for torpidity so far as work was concerned. The average battleship took at least three, more often four, years to build. But it was generally acknowledged that these things had to be, and that it was no more difficult to move a mountain than to revolutionize a Dockyard. However, as Fisher once wrote to his private secretary,[1] "When you are told a thing is impossible, that there are insuperable objections, then is the time to fight like the devil."

He carried this principle into his work at the Dock-

[1] Now Sir C. Walker, K.C.B.

CHAP. V 1890-1892

yard. He began by speeding up construction, with the result, to everybody's surprise, that the *Royal Sovereign* was built in two years, a hitherto unheard-of speed. His view was the common-sense one: "If you build two ships in the same time as it formerly took to build one, then you want half the number of slips and half the plant; therefore you effect a great saving in capital outlay and depreciation; moreover, a ship gets into commission earlier, and your Fleet therefore is stronger; and, instead of a ship being almost obsolete by the time she is commissioned, she is in the prime of her power."

The methods he used were peculiar to himself. One important official was hard to move out of his office. Fisher wanted him to visit, and supervise personally, the building sheds more often; but to this he demurred; so, one morning, Fisher sent him a note to tell him that he had heard that there was going to be a vacancy at Trincomalee, one of the tropical Dockyards, the following year, for which he was eligible. That was all! But according to all accounts that official was seen, within two minutes of receiving that note, sprinting down to the building sheds, and ever after they received most conscientious attention.

One way that he had of encouraging the workmen was to find out quietly from the charge hand the names of one or more of the men who were working on the *Royal Sovereign*. A little time afterwards he would pass one of them and say, "That's right, Thomas Williamson, glad to see you digging out so well." "Good gracious me, the Admiral knows my name," the man would think, and the report went round the Yard that the Admiral knew the names of all the men. The net result of such craft and energy

Photo : J. Russell & Sons

REAR-ADMIRAL SIR JOHN FISHER

Controller of the Navy

was that the *Royal Sovereign* was, as we have said, built in just two years.

Of course the carping critics said that this result was obtained by all the other work in the Yard being stopped. There is little doubt that on the introduction of such an innovation, a small amount of other work suffered for a time, but this was only a temporary phase; normal work in future proceeded alongside rapid shipbuilding, and when once the "impossible" had been shown to be possible, the other Dockyards and private shipyards had to follow suit; and the time now occupied in building a battleship is solely dependent on the supply of the heavy-gun mountings.

In other matters besides shipbuilding Fisher compelled speed of working. Occasionally one of the barbette guns of a ship required replacing. The time taken for this work he considered to be too long; so, the next time a ship came in for this change, he had a chair brought on to the barbette and expressed his intention of remaining there until the change was effected. He had a table brought and his lunch served; rather like the Queen of Spain at the siege of Gibraltar, but with happier results, for the gun was shifted in what was then considered the impossibly short time of four hours. This was in the end reduced to a small matter of two hours instead of two days.

Fisher had been barely eight months Admiral Superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard when, on the 1st February, 1892, he was appointed to the Board of Admiralty as Controller and Third Sea Lord—a post which gave him charge of the building, arming, fitting-out, and repair of the ships of the Navy. He held this appointment for five and a half years, during

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which time he served under Lord George Hamilton, Earl Spencer, and Mr. Goschen as First Lords; and Admiral Sir Arthur Hood, Sir Anthony Hoskins, and Sir Frederick Richards as First Sea Lords. The two main features of this period were the introduction of water-tube boilers into the ships of the Navy, and the adoption of destroyers as sea-going torpedo vessels. There were, of course, innumerable smaller matters with which Fisher had to deal, and on which he left his mark; but these were largely questions of development and progress, and not of any radical departure from previous designs.

The water-tube boiler was a vast improvement on the old cylindrical, or tank type, for naval purposes. The essential differences were that in the old form the water to be converted into steam was large in quantity, and the hot gas from the furnace, which was the chief boiling agent, travelled in tubes which passed through the water; while in the new form of boiler only a small quantity of water was kept in the boiler, and this was held in small tubes led directly through the furnace where they were surrounded by the hot flames and gases. It is evident that, in an arrangement of this sort, the smaller quantity of water could be converted into steam in a very much shorter time than was possible with the large quantity of water which was the essential feature of the older type of boiler. Steam could be raised from cold water in one-quarter of the time that was possible with the old-pattern boilers; this not only affected the time in which steam could be raised in harbour, but rendered it possible to supply a sudden call for steam when at sea with much greater rapidity than hitherto had been the case.

The Engineer-in-Chief, Sir John Durston, was a strong advocate for the water-tube type, and Fisher

at once perceived the great tactical advantage that this boiler would give to the Fleet; he therefore strongly championed its introduction. Like every new idea, it met with violent opposition, especially in Parliament. It may be taken as a truism that, whenever a non-expert body like the House of Commons meddles with technical development, its interference retards progress and does harm.

The shipbuilding and engineering element in the House were against the water-tube boiler: firstly, because they did not understand the naval problem; secondly, because their firms would have had to scrap a lot of old plant and provide new machinery if it had been generally adopted; and thirdly, because its advantages were not so marked for merchant vessels as for men-of-war. Added to this was the undoubted fact that the first few of these boilers which were introduced (those of the "Belleville" type) gave trouble, and rumour exaggerated their defects.

There is a class of person in this world which is constitutionally unable to see beyond the present, into the future. It is the curse of progress. Unless a man has sufficient knowledge to discriminate between defects that can be avoided and overcome by improved design or construction, and those that are inherent in a design and therefore cannot be surmounted, he should hold his peace. This, however, is exactly the class of person who is apt to take fright and voice the loudest condemnation.

Fisher, in his *Records*, writes:

> Sir William Allan, M.P., with the torso of a Hercules and the voice of a bull, and the affectionate heart of a Mary Magdalene, did not know Latin, and he asked me what my motto meant:
> "Fiat Justitia—Ruat Coelum."

CHAP. V
1892-1893

I had sent it to him when he was malignantly attacking me because, as Controller of the Navy, I had introduced the water-tube boiler. Sir William was himself a boiler maker, and he had to scrap most of his plant because of the new type of boiler.

I said the translation was, "Do right and damn the odds."

This is what Fisher continually throughout his life had to do. He was always damning odds in the most profane manner.

The water-tube boiler was his first taste of real, organized antagonism, and by it he, for the rest of his life, gauged the utter foolishness of Parliamentary opposition to technical improvements. This battle of the water-tube boilers was so fraught with importance to the Navy, while at the same time it illuminates so vividly the evils of Parliamentary meddling, and, further, shows up so strongly Fisher's tenacity, that it is worth dealing with it at rather greater length than otherwise would be necessary.

Messrs. Thornycroft & Yarrow in 1892 were the original introducers of this form of boiler into naval design. Further experiments were undertaken by the Admiralty in the gunboat *Sharpshooter*. These trials were begun in 1894; but it was when the Admiralty determined to put Belleville boilers in the large cruisers *Powerful* and *Terrible* that opposition became most marked, both in Parliament and the Press—opposition that was described by Sir Frederick Richards, the then First Sea Lord, a man of fairly equable temperament, as "most strenuous, not to say rancorous." In spite of this opposition, Fisher persisted, and his successor, Admiral Arthur Wilson, also persisted; but Mr. Goschen, the First Lord, on being informed that sixty of the supporters of the Government in the House of Commons would vote against the Navy

Estimates if the water-tube boiler were introduced, appointed a Committee to consider the whole question. *This decision was made at a time when the reasons for practically all the defects of the Belleville boiler had been discovered and the defects corrected.* The First Lord, further, gave verbal instructions that no Admiralty contractor was to be a member of the Committee; hence no one, except the one naval engineer officer appointed, had any practical knowledge or experience of a water-tube boiler. The first thing, therefore, that had to be done when the Committee met, was to have them instructed in the subject on which they were appointed to adjudicate.

These developments occurred after Fisher had left the Admiralty, but it is only fair to his memory to trace the controversy to its conclusion in order to vindicate the accuracy of his judgment.

In time the Committee issued an interim report, and made several suggestions, all of which were subsequently proved to be wrong. The damning facts that finally emerged were that, owing to the incursion of Parliament and the Press into a technical discussion, of the essential details of which they were in complete ignorance, a large sum of money, approximately £84,000, had been wasted; the Navy was eventually saddled with eighteen ships of reduced efficiency; a serious delay had been caused in the construction of new ships; an immense amount of unnecessary work had been thrown on the Admiralty; and, finally, the boiler that had been utterly condemned by the Boiler Committee was, two years afterwards, praised by the Admiral[1] who had presided over that Committee, after he had had the advantage of practical experience

[1] Admiral Sir Compton Domvile, K.C.B.

CHAP. V 1892-1894

of its working in the largest Fleet the country possessed.

If it had not been for the tenacity of Fisher and his successor, Sir Arthur Wilson, we might well have been placed in a position of considerable inferiority as regards foreign navies. The lesson to be learned is for Parliament to trust the Admiralty and—*Ruat coelum.*

Perhaps Fisher's term as Controller will be best remembered as the time when destroyers were introduced into the Navy. In 1892 Mr. Yarrow visited Fisher at the Admiralty and told him that he was in possession of the details regarding the new torpedo boats that the French Government was building, and asked him if he would like still faster ones for the Navy. Fisher, of course, jumped at the suggestion and threw himself whole-heartedly into the design. It was from this conception that our first two destroyers, the *Havoc* and the *Hornet,* saw the light. Fisher asked Mr. Yarrow what they should be called. —" That's your job," replied Mr. Yarrow.—" Well," said Fisher, " we'll call them ' *Destroyers,*' as they're meant to destroy the French boats " ; and this name has remained with them ever since.

These vessels were so successful that more were ordered immediately, tenders being invited from the other torpedo-boat builders. This unfortunately led to a difference of opinion between the Admiralty and Mr. Yarrow, who felt aggrieved that the drawings of his vessels had been sent to other firms to guide them in design. At first sight such a complaint appears reasonable, but it must be remembered that this interchange of plans on the part of the Admiralty is a common practice, so that if a particular firm

sacrifices something to-day, it will in all probability gain to-morrow. Moreover, the Navy is a vast experimental establishment where experiments on the scale of twelve inches to the foot are daily being carried out—experiments which it would be impossible for any private firm to finance. The result of this experimental work is placed at the disposal of the competing firms ; and it is largely owing to this experience that any new departures in their designs can be traced. The Admiralty therefore insist, quite properly, that they shall be free to use competitive designs for the good of the Navy. This principle has formed a bone of contention at different times over subjects as different as gun-mountings, engines, and submarines ; and the Admiralty have always insisted on their point of view. Their unanswerable dictum is, " If you do not care to work with the other firms for the good of the Navy, then you will no longer be asked to tender." The prestige that supplying vessels or armaments to the British Navy confers on a private firm is so important a factor in getting orders from foreign countries, that a threat of this sort brings home to the contractor the great benefit that association with the Admiralty confers on him—an advantage which outbalances any problematic loss that community of design may entail.

As usual, Parliament took a hand in the controversy, knowing nothing except one side of the case ; but, fortunately, this interruption did not last long. Years afterwards Fisher met Mr. Yarrow[1] in the corridor of the Admiralty. He at once went up to him, took him by the arm, and said, " Hullo ! How are you ? You're the man who nearly drove me into a lunatic

[1] Now Sir Alfred Yarrow, Bart.

CHAP. V 1892-1894

asylum over your wretched destroyer design," and friendship was established once more. Fisher further took care that a baronetcy should be conferred on Mr. Yarrow for his great services to the country during the war.

Fisher, with the other Sea Lords, was engaged in a battle-royal over the Navy Estimates of 1893–4. Sir William Vernon Harcourt was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Gladstone the Prime Minister, Lord Spencer the First Lord. The Board of Admiralty put forward their proposals for the building programme for the year, which, in view of the programmes of other countries, was not in any way excessive. The Chancellor insisted on a reduction, and was backed up by the Prime Minister. The Sea Lords refused to budge an inch. Moreover, in the House of Commons the Chancellor stated that the Admiralty had agreed to a reduction, which was not a true statement and nearly caused the Board instantly to resign.

Fisher tells the story, in his diffuse but amusing way, in his *Records*, leaving out, however, the lapse of the Chancellor. It is well worth quoting verbatim :

> I was the particular Superintending Lord at the Board of Admiralty, who, as Controller of the Navy, was specially responsible for the state and condition of the Navy ; and it was my province, when new vessels were required, to replace those getting obsolete or worn out. Sir Frederick Richards and myself were on the very greatest terms of intimacy. He had a stubborn will, an unerring judgment, and an astounding disregard for all arguments. When anyone, seeking a compromise with him, offered him an alternative, he always took the alternative as well as the original proposal and asked for both. Once bit, twice shy ; no one ever offered him an alternative a second time.
>
> However, he had one great incapacity : no one could write a more admirable or concise minute, but he was as dumb as Moses. So I became his Aaron. The moment arrived when that magnifi-

cent old patriot, Lord Spencer, had to choose between fidelity to his lifelong friend and leader, Mr. Gladstone, and his faithfulness to his country. Sir Frederick Richards, the First Sea Lord, had convinced him that a certain programme of shipbuilding was vitally and urgently necessary. Mr. Gladstone would not have it. Sir Frederick Richards and myself, in quite a nice way, not quite point-blank, intimated that the Sea Lords would resign. (My bread and cheese was at stake, but I did it !) Lord Spencer threw in his lot with us, and conveyed the gentle likelihood to Mr. Gladstone, whereupon Sir William Harcourt and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman were alternately turned on to the three of us (Lord Spencer, Sir Frederick Richards, and myself) sitting round a table in Lord Spencer's private room. I loved Sir William Harcourt ; he was what might be called " a genial ruffian," as opposed to Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, who, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, was a perfect beast, without a single redeeming feature that I ever found out. Sir William Harcourt always started the conversazione by insulting Lord Spencer (quite in a friendly way) ; then he would say to Sir Frederick Richards, " I always thought that one Englishman was equal to three Frenchmen, and according to this table of ships required, which has been presented to the Prime Minister, it takes three Englishmen to manage one Frenchman." Old Richards would grow livid with anger ; he wanted to say, " It's a damned lie ! " but he couldn't get the proper words out !

He had an ungovernable temper. There was a famous one-legged cabman at Portsmouth whom Sir Frederick Richards hired at Portsmouth railway-station by chance to drive him to the Dockyard. He didn't recognize the man, but he was an old shipmate who had been with him when Sir Frederick Richards commanded a brig on the west coast of Africa suppressing the slave-trade —he led them all a dog's life. The fare was a shilling, and ample at that ; and as old Richards got out at the Admiral's door, he gave the cabman five shillings, but the cabby refused it, and said to old Richards, " You *drove* me for nothing on the coast of Africa ; I will drive you for nothing now," and he rattled off, leaving old Richards speechless with anger. He used to look at Sir William Harcourt in exactly the same way. I thought he would have apoplexy sometimes.

Dear Lord Spencer was pretty nearly as bad in his want of lucid exposition, so I usually did Aaron all through with Sir William

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Harcourt, and one of the consequences was that we formed a lasting friendship.

When I was made a Lord, Stead came to my house that very morning and said he had just had a message from Sir William Harcourt (who had then been dead for some years) saying how glad Sir William was; and the curious thing was that, five minutes afterwards, I got a letter from his son (now Lord Harcourt) congratulating me on my peerage, which had only been made known an hour before. I think Stead said Sir William was in heaven. I don't think he ever quite knew where the departed were!

Campbell-Bannerman was a more awkward customer. But it was all no use, we got the ships, and Gladstone went.

In May 1894 Fisher was rewarded for his good services by receiving the order of K.C.B., and on the 8th May of the following year he was promoted to Vice-Admiral. This, of course, was again a purely routine promotion.

During his time as Controller he had been responsible for the design of the *Renown*, half a battleship and half a cruiser. As a fighting ship she was not successful. The design followed the trend of naval opinion at that time, but naval ideas were then in a state of flux, which eventually were to be crystallized in the "Dreadnought" design; this, however, was still ten years distant.

At the end of the summer of 1896 Fisher left the Admiralty, and on the 24th August hoisted his flag in the *Renown* as Commander-in-Chief of the North American Station.

His term in this command was not destined to be of very long duration, nor to be marked by any arresting incident.

The *Renown* was the only large ship on the Station, and therefore little or no Fleet work could be done; but the usual ceremonial and *entente* visits had

to be carried out. Fisher relates how at one port he was invited to dine ashore, and after dinner he had to make a speech, during which he told one of his many stories. It was a fairly long anecdote, and during the recital he observed that a man sitting opposite had his eyes fixed intently on his face. This rather disconcerted him, but the man, noticing this, called out, "Don't mind me, Admiral!—don't mind me! Go on! I've been a liar myself all my life."

The following two letters give a good view of life in the *Renown* in this backwater of naval activity. One of his Lieutenants writes[1]:

Jacky, as he was known by both the officers and men under his command, had two sides to his character, which the sooner you recognized the better it was for you.

The first was a complete devotion to his Country and the Service. The second was a warm-hearted personal interest in all the officers and men under his command, and a loyal assistance to those who served him well, that won all our respect and affection.

The commission in the *Renown* was one of intense interest, and the ship was not only one of the smartest in the Navy, but also one of the happiest. There were no half-measures with Jacky; it was first in everything or—look out! We were once beaten in getting out torpedo nets. Result—no leave for the next few days until we reduced time to what afterwards was, if I remember right, never again beaten.

His methods were drastic, and when an officer had committed himself, the saying used to be, "Will he go home in the *Alpha* or the *Beta*?"—the two regular passenger ships from Bermuda to England. As a rule, the delinquent had not the choice.

On the other hand, if any of us were in trouble, or any of the youngsters were sick, he and Lady Fisher were the first to inquire about it, and when possible made Admiralty House our sanatorium; and a mighty pleasant hospital-house it was.

He always had at heart the comfort of the officers and men under his command, and there were few among those who served under him who had not some good reason to be grateful to him.

[1] Admiral Sir Heathcote Grant, K.C.B.

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1896

This is the second letter[1]:

One of the nicest characteristics of Lord Fisher was his devotion and kindliness towards the younger officers and middies of the Fleet, more especially to those of his own ship. He almost universally made it a practice whilst at Halifax, Bermuda, and later at Malta, of asking a percentage of the midshipmen, in turn, to spend a week-end at Admiralty House. These week-ends were a great joy to us, as he universally made one feel absolutely at home. I was "snottie" of his galley and barge.

"Jacky" was never satisfied with anything but "Full Speed." We shoved off from the accommodation ladder at full speed, and went alongside at full speed, then reversed engines also at full speed. We were gifted with such excellent engine-room artificers and stokers I cannot remember a single crash. He loved dash and making a fine effect. This boat is now attached to the Admiralty yacht at Portsmouth and is still known as "Jacky's" barge. She must be twenty-four years old.

His personality seems to have been inherited even by the inanimate articles with which he had been associated. The letter continues:

I have still a vivid recollection of the awe which the "great Jack" inspired whilst on board; not that he did any of us any harm, but he had such a terrific face and jaw, rather like a tiger, and he prowled around with the steady rhythmical tread of a panther. The quarter-deck shook, and all hands shook with it. The word was quickly passed from mouth to mouth when he came on deck. "Look out, here comes Jack." Everyone then stood terribly to attention, while the great one passed on and away.

Jacky was at all times immaculately dressed, if not always strictly in accordance with regulations. He took upon himself the licence of the Great. I have distinct recollections of his white tunic with roll collars showing a white linen collar and black bow tie; blue spats when in blue uniform, etc. We could see him for hours-on-end of an evening, hat in hand, tramping the parapet of the signal station at Bermuda, and Halifax, and, later on, the Barracca at Malta, watching his Fleet; but, at the same time, making great creative plans for the future ship (*Dreadnought*) and future Fleet of the Navy.

[1] Captain the Hon. Barry Bingham, V.C.

Hardly a day passed that he did not send for the brains of the Fleet to help him make some machine against *der Tag*; one day it would be the gunnery brains, the next torpedo, and so on. Then in his quiet moments, 4 a.m. or thereabouts, he would put everything down that he had collected, compressed, analysed, dovetailed, fitted into and made to work in the great Navy he was creating for the future. He loved a man to stand up to him. Often at dinner, when he had a cheery week-end party of Lieutenants and mids staying with him, he would relax and give us an insight into his keen sense of humour and kindliness of nature. Williamson and Paine pulled his leg and chaffed him in the most astounding way. Repartee was bandied about, and Jacky used to go into convulsions of merriment and laughter.

He adored dancing for dancing's sake; and frequently, when there were no ladies present, he would pick out officers to dance with him. I danced with him on several occasions, one of which I shall never forget as long as I live. It was a farewell party to the officers of the Fleet on board the *Renown* at Malta, afterwards relieved by the *Bulwark*. There were no ladies present, and so the officers danced together. Towards the end of the evening, as almost universally happens on these occasions, the dancing became more spirited. Jacky was observed going with the best. For the last waltz he pulled me out, off we went, faster and faster, dashing about, whirling and whirling, till I felt something unusual must happen, for we were riding for a fall. The inevitable did happen. We caught our legs in another pair and rolled over and over in the scupperway of the *Renown's* quarter-deck. Everyone was convulsed with laughter, including the Admiral.

During his cruises in the *Renown* Fisher had to pay complimentary visits to several of the principal ports. He loved to prepare programmes in every detail as to time and action, weeks and even months in advance. He would fix on certain items as essential, and he was invariably right; when once arranged, the programme was rigidly adhered to. On one occasion, when, months ahead, he had informed the Quebec authorities that he would arrive at 10.30 a.m. on a certain day, and anchor at a certain place, troubles

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arose lower down the river which delayed the ship, and she was about three minutes behind time. The time, 10.30 a.m., was reported to him when the ship was still a short distance from her anchorage berth. The heights of Quebec were thronged with spectators, and the Admiral was not going to have them say that he was late. "Blow the siren," he said, "and keep it going; it will divert their attention."[1]

It was during Fisher's period of command on this station that the Spanish-American War broke out. Great Britain was of course neutral; so our ships were not implicated. The war only lasted a few months, and resulted in Spain ceding the greater part of her western possessions to the United States.

The only other ruffle on these rather placid waters of time was the Fashoda scare of the following year. In September 1898 Lord Kitchener arrived at Khartoum and learned that Captain Marchand had arrived at Fashoda, and had planted the French flag there. Sir Edward Grey had, in 1895, publicly declared that such a proceeding would be an "unfriendly act," so the French had to choose between retiring or going to war. As a matter of fact, the French Army had appropriated the major part of the money that had been voted for naval stores in order to re-arm their field artillery. Their Navy was therefore totally unprepared for war, and the matter was amicably settled. Fisher, out on the North American Station, saw that the *Renown* was wasted in those waters; so he sent for the senior Captain on the Station and gave him detailed orders for attacking the French Islands in the West Indies. Every detail was carefully worked out, both for sea and land, as

[1] Communicated by Admiral Sir A. Gordon Moore, K.C.B.

to troops, transports, and naval escorts, with the General, Lord William Seymour, at Halifax. An instant attack on Miquelon, Îles des Saintes, and the French West India Islands was completely and thoroughly organized. He, however, had no intention of being out of the major fighting; he therefore arranged for the *Renown*, on the outbreak of war, to steam straight to Gibraltar with himself on board, so as to join the principal Battle Fleet.

In addition, however, and in response to the vein of humour that ran constantly through his whole nature, he arranged a little surprise for France.

Thirty-four years ago France was convulsed by the Dreyfus scandal, the details of which it is unnecessary to recapitulate; suffice it to say that Major Dreyfus was tried and convicted of treason, but doubts as to his guilt led to acrimonious discussions throughout the country, and to the breaking-up of families, and the parting of lifelong friendships. It seems now almost inconceivable that what was really a trivial matter should have let loose such a flood of passion. However, so it was. Dreyfus had been convicted and sent as a convict to the penal establishment of the "Devil's Island," French Guiana, and the tumult in France had died down.[1] Fisher conceived the idea of kidnapping Dreyfus, sending him to France, and landing him just at the moment that war broke out; hoping by so doing to fan once more the flame of controversy, and so weaken the Government and the prestige of the officers appointed to high command. He laid his plans accordingly; the submarine cables were to be cut, the island raided, and a fast ship was

[1] Colonel Dreyfus was subsequently acquitted and reinstated in the French Army.

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to rush over and throw this human apple of discord on to the coast of France at night. It is impossible to say what would have happened, in all probability the effect would have been slight; but, at all events, the idea was a bold one and it required a fertile brain to conceive it.

When trouble threatened with the United States over the Venezuelan affair, Fisher prepared for the possibility of war—a war, even then, forbidden by the history of the two countries as well as by the dictates of modern civilization, and now utterly impossible.

Fisher hated his ship being beaten, even at sports, and would take infinite trouble in regattas, and cricket and football matches, in order that his side should win. He has been seen running along the touch-line at Halifax shouting encouragement to the naval side, and when beaten said, "We'll win next time, even if I have to play myself!"

Early in 1899 he was ordered home to attend the first Hague Conference. He was selected as the Naval Representative of Great Britain by the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, who submitted his name to Queen Victoria without any reference to the First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. Goschen. This was the sequel to Fisher's fight over the transfer of naval ordnance from the Army to the Navy. Lord Salisbury remarked that Fisher had fought so well against his brother-in-law, Colonel Alderson, that he had little doubt that he would fight well at the Peace Conference.

The only description of Fisher at The Hague is provided by the pen of the late Mr. Stead, the well-known journalist. He knew Fisher intimately, and he wrote:

> At The Hague [in 1899] Fisher had a position the like of which no Admiral held at the second Conference in 1907. The naval

ascendency of Great Britain was then accepted by all. Germany was but a fourth-rate naval power. Japan had not proved her prowess. The Americans worked hand in glove with us; and among the naval delegates Fisher was like a little god. As he was personally most gracious, put on no airs, and danced like a middy till all hours in the morning, no man at The Hague was more popular than he.

Fisher's ideas as to war, and especially as to naval war, were all based upon those current in Nelson's time. He was a bit of a barbarian who talked like a savage at times, to the no small scandal of his colleagues at The Hague.

"The humanizing of War!" he declared. "You might as well talk of humanizing Hell! When a silly ass at The Hague got up and talked about the amenities of civilized warfare and putting your prisoners' feet in hot water and giving them gruel, my reply, I regret to say, was considered totally unfit for publication. As if war could be civilized! If I'm in command when war breaks out I shall issue my orders:

"'The essence of war is violence.'

"'Moderation in war is imbecility.'

"'Hit first, hit hard, and hit anywhere.'"

Fisher was fond of saying things to make them stick without much caring whether his hearers would take him seriously or not. He had the not uncommon notion—which the uniform experience of mankind has shown to be false—that nations are deterred from going to war by fear of the atrocities which accompany conflict. He exclaimed impatiently, "I am not for War, I am for Peace. That is why I am for a supreme Navy. Did I not write in your autograph book at The Hague, 'The supremacy of the British Navy is the best security for the peace of the world'? My sole object is peace. What you call my truculence is all for peace. If you rub it in, both at home and abroad, that you are ready for instant war with every unit of your strength in the first line, and intend to be first in, and hit your enemy in the belly, and kick him when he is down, and boil your prisoners in oil (if you take any!), and torture his women and children, then people will keep clear of you." . . . This is probably the conviction of many who would not care to express it, although they might be quick to act on it when the time of action came. The difference between them and Fisher is, that whereas they have two codes of ethics—one for peace-time and the other for war—he had only one code, and that

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was the code of war. His imagination was ever brooding over the thought of the great naval Armageddon in which at any time he might be summoned to take part.

I remember walking with him from church at The Hague in 1899 when he was in a moralizing mood. He was meditating over the futility of attempting any restrictions on the operations of naval warfare. The Delegates had been discussing the immunity of neutral coal-carrying merchantmen from seizure by the Fleets of the belligerents. "I listened to them," he said, "wondering that they could think any of their resolutions would be recognized in war. Look at me," he said. "When I leave The Hague I go to take command of the Mediterranean Fleet. Suppose that war breaks out, and I am expecting to fight a new Trafalgar on the morrow. Some neutral colliers try to steam past us into the enemy's waters. If the enemy gets their coal into his bunkers, it may make all the difference in the coming fight. You tell me I must not seize these colliers. I tell you that nothing that you, or any power on earth, can say will stop me from seizing them or from sending them to the bottom, if I can in no other way keep their coal out of the enemy's hands; for to-morrow I am to fight the battle which will save or wreck the Empire. If I win it, I shall be far too big a man to be affected about protests about the neutral colliers; if I lose it, I shall go down with my ship into the deep and then protests will affect me still less."

This interesting account clearly shows the views held by Fisher. He grasped firmly and ruthlessly tore off the virginal garments in which idealists had wrapped the vile hag of war and exposed her true loathsomeness. He was right in thinking that the way to wage wars in order to stop war was to attack the civil populations. Translated into terms of modern war weapons, Fisher's argument would be: "Get at the civil population, persuade all the males in the country and show them that they, their wives, their children, and babies will every night have to take refuge in an insanitary communal dug-out; be gaoled there for perhaps ten days by a layer of fetid gas that all

the time was lying in wait to tear their lungs to pieces and torture their senses; teach them that one out of every five of the civil population will most assuredly die a horrible death in the first year of the war, then there will be no more war. Peace will then have a far greater guarantee than is given by any number of Kellogg Pacts, or the veneer created by the League of Nations. Look how our civil population raved when the *Lusitania* was sunk! How they protested when bombarded by Zeppelins! How they cursed the enemy when our merchant vessels were sunk by submarines! All this anathematizing was because the immunity of the civil population in war was no longer recognized." Fisher warned the Prime Minister[1] in a Memorandum, six months before the war, that the German method of war at sea would be to sink our merchant vessels with torpedoes fired by submarines. The Navy recognized the danger; and the only doubt was whether Germany, owing to the impossibility of differentiating between belligerent and neutral, would risk bringing neutrals into the war. Germany did what Fisher had forecasted; and, in consequence, what others had foreseen also happened, namely, that the United States was drawn into the war.

The late war has opened the eyes of the civil populations to the possibilities of starvation, and death from explosive and poisonous gas bombs. Fisher was very few years ahead of his times when he wrote, "Torture the women and children, and then people will keep clear of you." He was a prophet!

So far as the limitation of armaments was concerned, the Conference was a fizzle. Germany was totally opposed to limitations of any sort; and no

[1] Mr. Asquith.

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other nation, not even Russia, the convening nation, was keen in the matter, so the subject was dropped.

Fisher added considerably to his reputation by the part he took in the discussions; his name spread beyond the narrow circle of the Navy, and foreign countries for the first time realized that we had a sailor who in war-time would stand no nonsense. This knowledge, undoubtedly, for the next few years, was a potent factor in the preservation of peace between this country and Germany.

Arthur Peel Charles à Court R. P. Maxwell Ronald Hamilton

H. L. Ardagh. J. A. Fisher Julian Pauncefote. Henry Howard.

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CHAPTER VI

1899—1902

He found the Fleet on a cruising trip, set out on the seven seas,
Painted as fine as a festal gown, tricked out like a maid to please,
And he called the ships from their dancing, and steadied them up, and hurled
The thunder of all their cannon by the five great gates of the world.

HAROLD BEGBIE.

Joins the Mediterranean Fleet—Official visits—The incident of the steward's boat—Appoints committee to deal with manœuvres—Inspections—Drastic action with regard to incompetents—Fleet tactics—Lord Charles Beresford—Meets Mr. Arnold White—Unpreparedness of the Fleet—Lord Selborne visits Malta—The water carnival—Fisher's lectures—Visit to the Sultan Abdul Hamid—Kiamil Pasha—Manœuvres with the Atlantic Fleet—Importance of speed of steaming—Dines all the Chief Engineers—Lord Charles's campaign in England—Offered post of Second Sea Lord—How he nearly left the Navy—Foresees *Entente* with France—Letter from British Ambassador at Constantinople.

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AT the conclusion of the session of The Hague Conference, Fisher left to take command of the Mediterranean Fleet. His arrival on the station and assumption of command were carried out with his usual disregard of conventions.

After the retirement of Sir John Hopkins from the command owing to ill-health, the Fleet had been placed under the orders of Rear-Admiral Sir Gerard Noel, who had the well-deserved reputation of being one of the most able fleet-tacticians in the Navy. He had arranged a cruise with the Battle Fleet to the western part of the station, and during that cruise had carried out a series of interesting tactical

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manœuvres. Fisher met the Fleet shortly before their return to Malta, and most generously decided not to take command of the ships at once, but to leave the Rear-Admiral to complete the cruise he had planned. He, however, took the opportunity of receiving and paying the usual official calls. These calls were always a nuisance, in that they often extended over several days. Each Captain had to board the flagship and pay his respects to the Admiral, who in turn had to pay an official visit to each ship. Fisher swept away this waste of time by directing all the Captains to assemble on board his flagship at 10 a.m., and there he received them all together, the whole ceremony lasting only half an hour. He then called in turn, for three minutes only, on board each ship, so that all the official visits were ended and the conventions were satisfied in a single day by 1 p.m. The *Renown*, his flagship, then sailed for Malta.

Fisher's arrival at Malta was marked by an incident, small in itself, but one that showed clearly his extraordinary foresight and prescience even in the smallest everyday matters. He was always particular to let the bones of his hand be felt through the flesh early in his various commands. He found that it saved a lot of trouble afterwards. His steward asked that his marketing boat might be sent to the ship as soon as convenient. It was Sunday, and Fisher saw his opportunity. He sent for an officer to go ashore on duty. A Sub-Lieutenant appeared; he instructed him to go to the Chief Constructor and tell him to have the boat alongside the *Renown* at noon, adding, "He will say it's Sunday and he's got no men; just tell him to have it here." Surely enough, the Chief Constructor, who was smoking a Sunday-morning

cigarette, said exactly the words Fisher had prophesied. The Sub-Lieutenant promptly replied, "The Commander-in-Chief said you would say that; but, all the same, he wants his boat at noon." At noon the boat arrived. The story flew quickly round the Fleet; and everyone appreciated that it was well to "stand from under," and not be dropped on by a man who knew so much and left so little to chance.

Soon after the arrival of the Fleet, Fisher called together a Committee to put forward proposals for manœuvres for the Fleet. Such an act was unprecedented in the annals of the Navy. Hitherto the Admiral alone, or at most in consultation with his Flag Captain, had devised the operations of a Fleet; yet Fisher did not hesitate to call together a Committee of Captains and Commanders, but mainly of Commanders, to advise him! This caused considerable heart-burnings, and some of the Captains who were not on the Committee felt themselves aggrieved; for it was brought home to them, for the first time, that the brains which were to be useful to the Commander-in-Chief were not of necessity to be found in the heads of the most senior of the officers. All the senior officers had necessarily begun their careers, and spent most of their service, in a Navy where the lore of the sailing ship was the main study of the naval officer. Some few had kept abreast of the times and had assimilated the vital changes that steam and modern science had brought about, but the majority had not done so. On the other hand, the younger officers had grown up in a different atmosphere, and had not to forget the past before they could appreciate the requirements of the present.

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Fisher knew this, and picked his men accordingly, for he was not prepared to let injured feelings stand in the road of the efficiency of his Fleet. His one test was "efficiency," and to this everything else had to give way.

When the Committee assembled, Fisher in his opening address asked that any officer, whoever he might be, who had any views concerning the defence of the Fleet against torpedo craft, or the use of such vessels in conjunction with the Fleet, should forward them to him. He explained, in his dry, inimitable manner, how at The Hague the German Admirals had rallied him, saying that our battleships were useless, since in war they would all inevitably be sunk by the German torpedo craft. This had given him cause for deep reflection, and he was determined to prove that the idea was fallacious.

It is impossible to exaggerate the new ardour, and the feeling of relief, produced in the younger generation of officers by Fisher's address. They felt that, at last, the day had dawned when mere peace ideas and manœuvres were about to give way to real preparations for meeting a war when it came. Hitherto no visible preparations for war had been made in the Fleet. Admiral Noel, one of the most modern-minded officers, had asked that two officers from each ship should send him remarks on the manœuvres undertaken during the late cruise; but he had expressly disclaimed any idea that the evolutions would be of value in war-time; they were, he explained, merely to be regarded as tactical gymnastical exercises for practising officers in the handling of their ships. Yet, only two years before, the shadow of war had fallen for a short month on the

Fleet, when the Fashoda incident had nearly evoked armed conflict with France; and during this period of tension most of the thinking officers had deplored the absence of any certain knowledge of the intentions of the Commander-in-Chief, and of his views on the fighting formation of the Fleet in case of an outbreak of hostilities.

Fisher at once began an inspection of the various ships; and an inspection, in his eyes, was useful in giving him the opportunity of forming an opinion of the capacity of the senior officers of the ship and of the training the crew had received. Here again he broke through tradition. The forenoon's inspection became a strenuous affair, each ship being treated to a complete combination of exercises. He would first inspect the crew at "general quarters" (fighting stations); then in quick succession there would come, "Out torpedo nets"—"In nets"—"Hoist out all boats and abandon ship"; and then, before the men were fairly on board again, there would come, "Out bower anchor and cable"—"Fire quarters"—"Out fire-engines for a fire on shore"—and "Out stream anchor." These evolutions would follow one another without a moment's interval, and perhaps before the last evolution had been thoroughly completed the next would begin. When he left the ship, she would resemble a wreck, with her upper deck a mass of ropes and débris. His eyes, however, had followed everything, and every one, especially the Commander, on whom the brunt of the work of conducting the exercises had fallen; and the whole time he had been making mental notes which were subsequently conveyed to the ship in memorandum form.

Nor did he hesitate to take drastic action when he

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considered it necessary. As the Commander of one ship did not show the energy and interest that this volcanic inspection demanded, he was discharged from his ship and sent home the same evening, most of his belongings having to follow in a subsequent steamer. The matter did not end there; for when the mail-steamer arrived in England, he was met by a boat and taken to another steamer that was on the eve of sailing, and, to his astonishment, and before he had thoroughly appreciated what was happening, he found that he was on his way to join a harbour ship on an extremely hot station. At another inspection the Lieutenant in command of a destroyer exhibited gross ignorance of the details of his ship; he left the next day for China in another ship as a watch-keeping officer. In all such cases Fisher had previous knowledge of the incapacity of these officers, and made their failure at his inspection the excuse for displacing them.

Efficiency was his watchword, efficiency in officers, in men and in ships. Anyone who did not come up to his standard had to go under, for he knew well enough that there were dozens of competent officers ready to take the place of the incompetents; and the only thing that mattered to him was that his Mediterranean Fleet should be as efficient as he could possibly make it. Personal considerations were ignored, and he explained to one such officer that while he was extremely sorry for his wife and family, if it had been war-time he would have been shot! At the same time merit was fully recognized, and officers who were deserving were strongly recommended and pressed forward for promotion. One of his pet sayings was, "Favouritism is the secret of efficiency."

At the inspection of one of the destroyers, for no vessel was too small for Fisher to inspect personally, he saw written in letters of gold in some prominent place the motto, "Ut veniant omnes."—"What's that?" he asked.—"Let 'em all come," replied the Lieutenant in command. Fisher never forgot this, and he often quoted it afterwards, for it was a mixture of Nelsonian sentiment and humour that greatly appealed to him.

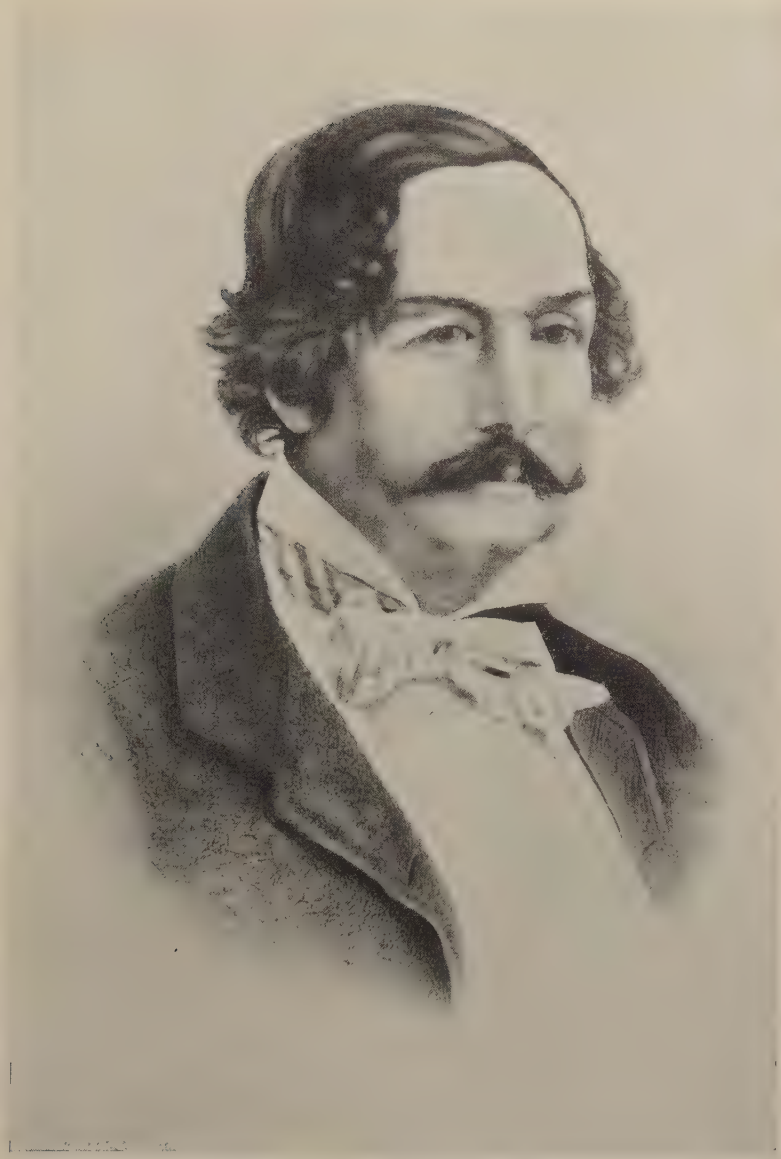
His extraordinary energy at this period struck all those associated with him. He constantly got up as early as four in the morning; and it was his invariable habit to keep a paper and pencil at his bedside; so that, when he woke in the night, as he often did, he could at once make a note of anything that came into his ever-active brain. This habit of early rising, though not always looked upon with favour by his staff and others around him, was the reason for his always being ahead of his work, and apparently never being hurried. It was extraordinary how, amidst all the problems connected with the Service and its subsidiary interests, he was able to devote so much time to details.

He had a great liking for detailed organization; this was made manifest in the many operations and exercises that he initiated when in command of the Mediterranean Fleet. It was partly due to this and partly to his theory "that any programme is better than no programme" that so much time was spent in preparing the details of these operations and exercises. He tried, if possible, to start on a cruise with a complete programme, all the details of which, even to the necessary signals, were outlined by him in advance. It must not be imagined that this pre-

arrangement was due to any fear of being unable to cope with situations as they arose, for nobody was more ready to make an instant decision if required. This was perhaps more apparent when he was on the bridge of his flagship than at any other time. Signals which to the ordinary person would appear to require careful consideration never caused him a moment's hesitation; and no Admiral ever wrote out so many signals in his own handwriting or at such a speed.

In those days his staff usually consisted only of the Flag Captain who commanded his flagship, a secretary, and a Flag Lieutenant. For a short period he had also a Chief of Staff; but by far the largest part of the staff work was done by himself alone. When on the bridge at sea there was very little in the Fleet that ever escaped his eye. His impatience at any slight delay in the hoisting of signals was, at times, a great trial to his Flag Lieutenant, and he was equally impatient with the Captains of ships that did not immediately answer the flagship's signals. It was his standing order that a three-pounder gun should always be kept loaded with a gunner's mate standing by ready to fire, to call attention to any signal he hoisted which was not immediately answered.

His keen sense of humour often helped him to deal with difficult situations. Stories about him and his witty actions spread quickly through the Fleet, and caused all to look on him as a very human though severely strict Commander-in-Chief. The sobriquet of "Jackie" became a term of affection as well as of admiration. In this connection the following small example of his ready dealing is worth quoting. One day he made a signal to a small cruiser to take up a certain position. As it was well known that he



CAPT. WILLIAM FISHER OF THE SEAFORTH HIGHLANDERS (ROSS-SHIRE BUFFS), 78TH HIGHLANDERS

A.D.C. to the Governor of Ceylon, Inspector-General of Police, Ceylon, the Father of Lord Fisher

expected any such manœuvre to be executed at full speed, off the cruiser went as hard as she could. Unfortunately she had misunderstood the order, and started on the wrong course. At once a signal was made from the flagship, "What the devil are you doing?" The Captain of the cruiser saw that he had made some mistake; and, in order to gain time and try to discover what was amiss, and possibly at the same time wishing to embarrass temporarily the Commander-in-Chief, signalled back, "Please repeat third word." Quick as lightning came the reply, for an upheaval in the Flagship's Signal Department had been at once visible, and almost immediately at every yardarm and each masthead flags broke out spelling the word "Devil," "devil," "devil," "devil," "devil." A suitable apology for misunderstanding the Admiral's signal was now forthcoming, the cruiser took up her correct station and the incident closed.

Another incident caused amusement. While at sea the Fleet "wheeled," a small Cruiser being the pivot-ship. The manœuvre was not carried out well—there were several new Captains in the ships—so a signal was made to the cruiser pivot-ship, "Manœuvre well executed." Since the pivot-ship had to take no action at all beyond reducing speed, the remainder of the Fleet drew their own conclusions as to what the signal was intended to convey. This is another good example of Fisher's methods of reproof, which rebuked and at the same time removed any soreness by causing laughter.

During the early part of his command of the Mediterranean Fleet he renewed acquaintance with Lord Charles Beresford, who had succeeded Sir Gerard Noel as the Rear-Admiral Second-in-Command. Lord

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Charles's advent had been heralded by newspaper paragraphs stating that he was about to go out to the Mediterranean, and intimating that there he would teach tactics to the Fleet, for which purpose he had devised special methods. There was much amused surmise among the officers on the station as to what would happen when he arrived, and how the Commander-in-Chief would appreciate such assistance in the education of the Fleet; for, by that time, they had sufficient experience of Fisher to know that he was not the sort of person to brook any interference of this nature.

The Rear-Admiral was cordially received, and everything worked smoothly until one morning Lord Charles landed the crew of his galley on the Corradino parade-ground, at the same time making a signal that he would be glad to see there any of the Captains who would care to witness some tactics. This gave Fisher his opportunity. His first step was to order Lord Charles's Flag Captain to forward his reasons for having landed men for drill on the Corradino without, according to the station orders, having first obtained permission from the Chief of the Staff. This, of course, brought in Lord Charles, who explained that the failure to ask permission was his omission. An interview followed in which he was told that Fisher welcomed his coming to the Mediterranean Fleet, but he must thoroughly understand that it was as Second-in-Command and not Commander-in-Chief, and that if he was desirous, as most Rear-Admirals were, of taking a portion of the Fleet on an independent cruise, the best way of achieving his object was by paying scrupulous attention to the limitations of his command. This cleared the atmosphere, and for the remainder of his time in the Mediterranean Fisher

and Lord Charles Beresford were on quite amicable terms ; and they so remained until a much later period.

" Charlie " Beresford, as he was always affectionately called, had a fund of humour. After a farewell dinner to a senior Captain who was leaving Malta for Naples, in order to take up an appointment at the Admiralty, one of the ladies said as she went over the gangway of the *Renown*, " How sad ! I feel inclined to cry ! " Lord Charles Beresford at once called out, " Hold on till I get my goloshes," and the whole party was delighted with his ready wit, which banished any idea of tears and convulsed them with laughter.

Lord Charles, one of the most charming of men personally, was an Irishman, and was therefore always spoiling for a fight ; moreover, he was a politician, a combination that caused him always to be a stormy petrel with a gale following close in his tracks. Shortly after his arrival he had asked several politicians and journalists to visit him in his flagship, and Fisher wisely took the precaution to obtain Admiralty approval for their visit. Lord Charles subsequently, and in consequence of this visit, became involved with communications to the Press, and nearly came to utter grief in consequence. Fisher sent the following reply to a letter from the First Lord's Naval Secretary on this subject :

Many thanks for your letter of the 21st June, 1901, which has just arrived, and its enclosure about Beresford's letter to the *Daily Mail*. I have told Beresford that the Government has got a majority of 130 and all the newspapers and magazine articles in the world won't have the slightest effect ! So far as I am personally concerned, it will be of course obvious to you that I have nothing whatever to gain by kicking the shins of the Admiralty ! So that the articles (of which, by the way, I have only seen a

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portion) are certainly not written in my interest, and only serve to aggravate instead of smoothing and facilitating. I sent home Beresford's application to have his Parliamentary guests, so that there should be no question of their presence with the Fleet being known and recognized; and there would be a Parliamentary storm, I suppose, had they been denied. I am sorry words and phrases of mine are quoted, as you mention, but with a large Fleet like this the Admiral cannot hide his views and opinions, and mine, as you know, are very strong, specially when the other day I couldn't see a blessed thing on account of the smoke of the barbette guns, and so cursed the delay of smokeless powder. And you should hear your smart Commander Leveson cursing the delay in the supply of telescopic sights, gyroscopes, etc., etc. It's the want of *pre*-vision which is the alarming feature in these matters! I am very anxious Lord Selborne should read my letter No. 1166/2255A, 26th June, 1901, being sent home in *Himalaya*. I don't venture to think that I shall change the opinions of their Lordships, but I consider it my bounden duty to express my own opinions to them fully and unreservedly, and I trust you will agree with me in this matter.

It will be seen that Fisher took the opportunity to comment on the delays in making the Fleet efficient.

One of Lord Charles Beresford's friends was Mr. Arnold White, a prominent journalist. Fisher was asked to lunch to meet him, and thus began a friendship which lasted to the end of his life. Mr. Arnold White in a subsequent letter thus describes this first meeting:

During my sojourn in the Mediterranean I was writing for the *Daily Mail*, and I shall never forget the Sunday luncheon on the *Renown*, with most of the Captains present, when I ventured to suggest to the Admiral, in reply to his question as to why I wrote for a halfpenny paper, that the price of a paper had less effect upon the future of mankind than its circulation among people who could think and wished to know the truth about things. He seized the point like lightning, and the discussion by those present in controverting his arguments will never be forgotten.

Fisher subsequently carried on a regular correspondence with him, and the letters, which have been carefully preserved, form an interesting commentary on current naval events. Though Fisher was careful never to give away any secret information, he was a firm believer in the need for the Press being fed with truth and not with lies.

From the moment of taking over the command he had been much perturbed at the unreadiness of the Mediterranean Fleet for war, for he found it short of cruisers and destroyers as well as of every class of auxiliary vessel. His Fleet was not strong enough, of itself, to face the possible combination of enemies in the Mediterranean, and the Channel Fleet was normally too far off to reinforce him quickly. He wrote constantly about these matters in his official letters to the Admiralty, and his private letters abound in references to the same subject. Extracts from letters written to Mr. Arnold White explain his views :

6th November, 1900.

Private.

If my writing is a little shaky, it is because we are just now going 16½ knots in the *Renown* and my writing-table has got the "jumps." I have been very remiss in thanking you for your letter and its enclosure, and I compliment you on the row it has occasioned. A high official wrote to me it was *highly coloured!* I replied, "That may be so ; but if you want to attract the attention of the public, you must lay the colour on thick with broad lights and shadows."

Bishop Magee used to observe that a racehorse didn't pull up at the winning post ! However, you have your reward in having raised *The Times*, *Standard*, Mr. Chamberlain, and a multitude of minor papers, which I hope will rouse the country to the necessity of reconsidering the two-to-one standard (adopted without rhyme or reason at the time) and having our *two main fighting Fleets on a war footing*.

I should very much like to give you some recent facts to show

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how sadly we want strong men at Headquarters, but it is impossible to do so without transgressing official secrecy.

What I venture to suggest for your consideration is the necessity for constantly reiterating the undeniable fact that an initial naval disaster would (to use your own memorable words) be "irretrievable, irreparable, eternal," and that no number of naval Robertses (again quoting yourself) could retrieve such a disaster. Time would not permit, nor do means exist! In South Africa they were able to get more men who could shoot and ride, more mules, more rifles, more guns, etc.; but you can't go round the corner and get more destroyers, more cruisers, and more battleships!

It's the suddenness of naval fighting as compared with military operations that makes all the difference, *and necessitates our Mediterranean and Channel Fleets being on a war footing.*

It's common knowledge how dangerously deficient our Fleets on service are in cruisers and destroyers (and the necessary auxiliaries). These vessels, if hastily commissioned when war breaks out, cannot be expected to be so efficient as practised vessels; and what a burden to throw on the Admiral, suddenly to pitchfork on to him a mass of crude material at the moment when all his time and energies are required elsewhere than in educating newly mobilized ships and captains! If we had not got enough ships, men, or anything else, the Admiralty have only to say so (*as Sir F. Richards and his naval colleagues* [1] *did do*), and the House of Commons would surely give all that is required. Please note this is written for your private eye; but I feel constrained to let you know my private views on account of your kindly and most valuable interest in the vital necessity for a ready and all-powerful Navy.

I wish specially to ask you to keep on reiterating (reiteration is the secret of conviction) the paragraph "Wanted, Fleets on a war footing." That is the pith of the whole matter. And do not be drawn into discussing details or *modus operandi;* simply state the undeniable requirements that the Mediterranean and Channel Fleets should be kept organized for war in every detail, that it's criminal folly not to do so. There would not be time to mobilize ships and hire auxiliaries to be brought into play! The vital blow would have been struck! If the enemy had not struck the blow, then we ought to have done so. The whole present French naval

[1] This referred to threatened resignation of the Board of Admiralty. See page 113.

fighting scheme is based on their immediately taking the offensive, and certain steps have been taken lately which indicate and emphasize this fact, which has been publicly proclaimed by their chief naval authorities as their one chance of naval success against England, to catch us unprepared. Therefore keep on harping on that one subject—"Wanted, the Mediterranean and Channel Fleets on a war footing." That is, organized for instant war.

Since last June we have been hard at work in this Fleet and have carried out, and perfected by practice, nearly every operation that is likely to be required in case of war against France and Russia; and with great success; but we have been fearfully hampered by want of cruisers and destroyers—only three cruisers part of the time and twelve destroyers; so I had to use battleships as cruisers, and small torpedo boats as destroyers, and no auxiliaries.

These extracts are taken from other letters to Mr. Arnold White:

If you ask me the kernel of the whole question, I reply it lies in your Belshazzar words, "Preliminary failure in naval war means the ruin of the British Empire." This is the handwriting on the wall. The intense ignorance of men at the head of affairs is what appals me. As you so splendidly put it, "Parliament has found ample time to discuss dogs, midwives, and poor-law"; but the strength of the Navy and the existence of the Empire are of no concern to it. "Rome burned while Nero fiddled": our curse is the parochial politician in Parliament, and the ineptitude of our Foreign Office, and our ill-informed democracy. Can you reach them with this splendid article you have sent me? Is not a league of preaching friars required for a new crusade?

16th February, 1901.

The most powerful Cabinet Minister of the present time used the following words: "We must make an initial naval disaster humanly impossible, and we must be prepared to recommend and to bear all the sacrifices that are necessary for this purpose," and this has always been the feeling of the country. Admiral Bienaimé, the head of the French Admiralty, has allocated the prize of £600 to the naval officer who in his essay has stated that France must take an instant offensive in the naval war with England. The French say they will be off Malta from Toulon

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in thirty-six hours after the declaration of war (possibly they will be at Biserta, only 240 miles off Malta, before the declaration of war). In how many hours, pray, will that vast, crude, undigested, unpractical mass of our reinforcements reach Malta, or even Gibraltar, after the outbreak of war? Not one vessel will be sent before the declaration of war for fear of precipitating matters.

Such was the general tenor of all his letters at this time.

Being convinced that the French would make a dash at his Fleet on the outbreak of war, Fisher left no stone unturned to force the Admiralty to bring up the number of battleships and cruisers, as well as of auxiliary craft, to the standard requisite to enable him to ensure a successful repulse of the first onslaught.

It is always easier for Admirals to ask for ships than for the Admiralty to supply them. At Whitehall the authorities do not always visualize local needs so keenly as the Commander-in-Chief; and requests for additional ships come from every station, more especially when there is any possibility of strained relations with a foreign Power. In Fisher's case the demands were fully justified by the state of European politics, for the Mediterranean would certainly have been the main naval battlefield had war broken out. The Fashoda incident had shown how thinly the veneer of peace masked the liability to war at any moment, and the rapidity with which the crisis had developed should have demonstrated that Fisher's urgent plea for "instant readiness" was no alarmist demand. Moreover, the Boer War was still in progress; and at any moment some neutral Power might have become involved. Neutrals are prone to believe that their rights are being infringed; and war is always con-

tagious. The question of our right to search mail-steamers, for example, had already produced a state of tension with Germany. The Mediterranean Fleet needed to be strong enough, both to encounter the French and Russian Fleets at twenty-four hours' notice, and also to stave off any possible interference from other countries. Fisher carried on a lively correspondence with the Admiralty on this subject. His letters were forcible, but they never overstepped the boundaries of correct request and expostulation. He had ever in his mind the incident of the enforced retirement of Admiral Lord Hood[1]; he even alluded to this incident in his own lectures to the officers of the Fleet.

One result of the correspondence was to expedite the visit of Lord Selborne to Malta. The First Lord had intended to make the visit at a later date, in order to inspect personally the site of the projected new breakwaters, designed to protect the harbour from torpedo attack. Fisher's letters expedited the visit. He was accompanied by his Naval Secretary (Admiral Fawkes), the First Sea Lord (Lord Walter Kerr), and Rear-Admiral Custance, the Director of Naval Intelligence. Fisher wrote to a friend:

> Lord Selborne is bringing out the First Sea Lord and the Director of Naval Intelligence to Malta next week. . . . When Lord Selborne wrote me his decision to come out and discuss personally these matters, I said in my reply I hoped it wasn't a case of St. Paul and the Corinthians! "His letters are weighty and forcible, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible." I hope I shall be able to hold my own, though it's going to be four [persons] to one; but I am glad to say the betting out here is 2 to 1 on the Saint!

Nothing, of course, could withstand Fisher's

[1] See Volume II, page 38.

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enthusiasm and his unique exposition of his case when he had the opportunity to plead it in person ; and the Admiralty, always willing to do the right thing when fully convinced of the necessity, approved of most of his proposals.

During the visit of the First Lord to Malta a water carnival was arranged by the Fleet. As former events had proved, Fisher was a born stage-manager and excelled in arranging spectacular performances. The Grand Harbour of Valetta lent itself to such a pageant, and each ship vied with the other in producing some weird animal or device, mounted on a raft, or built on a boat, and illuminated with electric light. Processions of boats lit up with Chinese lanterns threaded their way among these monstrosities; and, with the ships themselves illuminated in outlines and brilliantly lit up, a fairy-like effect was produced, the beauty of which it is impossible to describe. The *pièce de résistance* was a huge whale which swallowed, and again ejected, Jonah with rhythmic regularity. A similar entertainment was given later when the Prince and Princess of Wales visited Malta and was immensely enjoyed by them.

During his tenure of command he gave a course of lectures to the officers of his Fleet. Never before had an Admiral used this means of explaining his views as to the manner in which the ships of his Fleet should fight, and as to the effects of invention and progress on naval warfare. He did more than merely expound his own opinions, for he even invited and welcomed ideas on these subjects from his subordinates. The lectures were inaugurated in a most characteristic manner. The day before he was going to deliver the first lecture he made a signal to the effect that he would

be glad to see the Captains and gunnery Lieutenants at Admiralty House at 10 o'clock the next morning, Saturday. The signal was intentionally worded so as not to constitute an order, but to leave attendance optional. Several officers had previous engagements which they did not think it necessary to cancel, and they did not attend. Those who attended were surprised to find two clerks stationed at the entrance of the ballroom, who took their names and the names of their ships. Fisher then delivered, to those present, a lecture on the uses of the various types of ships of the Fleet in war. He was a born lecturer; his discourses were constantly illuminated by flashes of wit, amusing stories, and sly digs at officialdom, so that, even in the summer heat of Malta, he managed to keep the crowded room engrossed.

That evening a second signal was made, *ordering* those officers who had failed to attend to appear the next (*Sunday*) afternoon. The lecture was then repeated for their benefit. No word of censure was passed, but nevertheless the hint was unmistakable. There was no need in the future to insist upon attendance; the trouble was that he was beset with applications from other officers of all ranks to be allowed to be present, for space set a limit to the numbers that could be accommodated, and for this reason only Captains, Commanders, Gunnery and Torpedo Lieutenants, and Chief Engineers could be permitted to attend.

One of the qualities that made Fisher so effective as an instructor was the complete absence of any assumption of superior knowledge. He had no hesitation in stating that he himself required information on many points, and in asking for ideas from the

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officers of his Fleet. This not only stimulated them all to use their brains, but it created a definite bond of fellowship between him and his subordinates. There were, of course, some few who either had no brains or did not know how to use them, who grumbled, and lamented the good old days when the Admiral was expected to work and live in solitary grandeur in a watertight compartment, while the other officers of the Fleet were satisfied to carry out their routine duties without being called on either to exhibit competence, or to hide their ignorance of the higher technique of their profession.

These lectures covered the whole range of strategy, tactics, and detailed preparations of individual ships and of the whole Fleet for action. Fortunately he preserved the notes that he made for the later lectures, and they afford a most interesting record of Fisher's complete grasp of the essential problems of the day. They afford a datum line from which to measure the progress in naval thought during the next fourteen years to the eve of the Great War. The subjects may perhaps not be of great interest to the general reader ; it is therefore thought preferable to include some extracts from these notes in a separate chapter, rather than to break the narrative by dwelling upon abstract naval problems of that day. In many cases the developments have been along different lines from those that could have been foreseen in 1901.

It is remarkable how facts crystallized and knowledge grew under Fisher's methods and régime. For example, a special table was set apart in a large room on the ground-floor of Admiralty House, on which were arranged blocks of wood to represent the various

ships of his Fleet, the battleships, cruisers, destroyers, etc. Certain of his special assistants had the entrée to this room at any time, and were free to evolve any arrangement for Fisher to see, and subsequently to discuss with them. When apparent finality was reached, the formation and disposition of the various units were noted with a view to trial with the Fleet at sea. Here the idea first saw light that a ship was no longer a self-contained unit, completely equipped in itself for both attack and defence; but that the unit had become a cluster of vessels, comprising the battleship for offence with her guns, together with small craft accompanying her, both for attack with torpedoes and for defence of the ship from the torpedoes of the enemy. All these ideas, although not wholly emanating from Fisher himself, owed their birth to his fostering care arising from his deep concern in the solution of the problems that confronted the modern Navy.

It must be appreciated that ideas regarding naval warfare were undergoing a complete revolution, owing to the developments which were taking place in length of gun range, and in range of hitting with the Whitehead torpedo. Fisher was busy both in organizing gun practices, to enable our gun ranges to be increased, and at the same time adapting our own Fleet tactics to these new conditions. He was up and at work at 4 or 5 every morning, and continued with scarcely any intermission till dinner-time. Though he never played any form of game, he took an immense interest in the Fleet matches, and especially in the performances of his own flagship. His one form of exercise was to walk to and fro on the flattest place he could find; for, as he once explained, if he had always to be looking where he was going to plant his next footstep, he

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could not keep his mind concentrated on the problem he was wrestling with during the walk! His favourite promenade was on the fortifications fronting the Admiralty House in Strada Mezzodi; and here he was practically undisturbed unless one of his "devils" joined him.

Fisher always appreciated the advantage of maintaining good relations with Turkey. He agreed with the remark made to him by Sultan Abdul Hamid, "Are not Turkey and Great Britain the two greatest Mohammedan Powers?" Consequently he looked upon our handling of the Turkish problem with some disgust. He took the opportunity of the summer cruise to visit the Sultan at Constantinople. The Sultan sent an Admiral who was his Naval A.D.C. to Lemnos to escort him up the Dardanelles. Fisher apparently, from his own account, made the most of this opportunity of inspecting the defences and of making friends with various Pashas. The Sultan received him most cordially, and was apparently much struck with him and his views. The Boer War was still in progress, and the Sultan was in some fear of the conflagration spreading to Europe, in which case he felt sure that Turkey would be thrown into the melting-pot. Fisher's supreme confidence in his Fleet went a long way to reassure the old potentate. At Constantinople he also met the British Ambassador, and discussed with him questions affecting the Eastern part of the command.

This same cruise gave him the opportunity of visiting Kiamil Pasha, who had been Grand Vizier and one of the most prominent of the Sultan's advisers. Fisher relates how this aged Vali was greatly impressed with the straightforward policy of England in European

politics. He specially remembered the fact that after the Crimean War, and also after the Turco-Russian War (which had been ended by the British Fleet forcing the Dardanelles when the Russians were almost at the gates of Constantinople), in spite of all that England had done for Turkey she had never asked for anything in return, whereas other nations were always on the look-out for an opportunity to grab something. This Turkish view of England was confirmed by a remark made to Fisher when he was inspecting the Dardanelles defences. He had been discussing with the Turkish Admiral the possibility of joint action between their two Navies; and, in conclusion, he asked if the Turkish officer would like any part of the discussion confirmed in writing. The Turkish Commander-in-Chief replied that he wanted no document; "if a British midshipman brought him a message, the word of a British midshipman was good enough for him."

This was, however, only a holiday outing, and he was soon at work again. Whenever the Fleet was at sea they carried out some prearranged operation, and the fact of all these exercises being arranged beforehand has led some to believe that Fisher was not an expert tactician, and that he could not act unless everything had been thought out in advance. This was totally incorrect. On the evidence of the officers in attendance on him on the bridge during the Fleet tactics, he never was at a loss in any emergency, and he acted on such occasions with remarkable rapidity. This might be expected, for rapidity of decision in an emergency is due largely to previous thought, and to the possession of a brain that does not weigh chances too minutely. The more an officer

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thinks over possible eventualities, the more ready he will be to act quickly when occasion arises; for, though the circumstances may not be identical with those visualized in previous meditations, they are certain to be analogous. Fisher was more fully prepared to deal with unusual events than the majority of our tacticians, and the result was instant and accurate action. The reason for his having a prearranged programme was that he invariably had some point he wished to try out, and he did not care to risk being led away from that point by side-issues. This most certainly would have been the case had he conducted the manœuvres in a haphazard manner. One of his officers thus records the nerve with which he manœuvred the Fleet:[1]

> Lord Fisher tried many novel tactical movements. I remember the Fleet in 1900 practising Fournier circles, ships being at one cable apart and closer. If I had any doubts as to his nerves being sound, this exercise would have set them at rest.

In 1901 Fisher had the desire of his heart, namely, joint operations between the Mediterranean and Channel Fleets at Lagos, which he had urgently requested the Admiralty to arrange. Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson was the Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet. Plans for action in case of war were worked out jointly by the two Admirals in complete accord, and the following extracts from letters give a glimpse of these few days:

1st September, 1901.

We are going on splendidly, but I must take care of the "foot of pride."[2] The King of Portugal is here in his yacht. We gave

[1] Admiral Loftus Tottenham.

[2] Psalm xxxvi, 11: "Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked remove me."

him a great banquet on board. It went off first-rate and the dinner was most excellent. The King comes again to lunch to-day. He enjoyed himself so much he wished to come again! He is a delightful man, very fat, very fond of the English and our Navy. He is a born sailor and was one and a half years in a torpedo boat.

I have had a very busy time. I have not had more than three hours' sleep at night for a week. But I am all right, but never one moment to spare, and have not read the newspapers since Malta.

He had been rather anxious about the result of manœuvring the Channel Fleet in conjunction with his own, and he gave the Captains of the Channel Fleet a lecture on the subject:

3rd September, 1901.

Everything going on first-rate. We had a splendid day yesterday manœuvring—the whole Fleet together, and it was a wonderful sight. A passing P. & O. liner stopped to see it. I don't want the "foot of pride" to come against me, but they all said it was the best day's tactics they had ever seen! We had arranged it, of course, long before, and I had rehearsed it many times, so I felt pretty sure it would come off well when the time came to put such a mass of ships through it. *We just mount up to fifty vessels*, which is a big lot to work together. We leave here, if all goes well, at 5 a.m. on Thursday, 12th September, and get to Malta on 16th September; but there is a good lot to get through before that, but the critical part is over, that is, the first having them all together in such a mass—now they all know their places. The Channel Captains apparently enjoyed their lecture, as they have asked for more. I have no time to write any more—I have not a moment to spare.

The "taking in tow" mentioned in this next letter was an evolution much practised by Fisher in order to save coal in war-time:

11th September, 1901.

We had a great day yesterday and very successful. To-morrow morning at 7 a.m. we leave here for good, and in the afternoon we part company from the Channel Fleet after going through a lot

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of tactics all the forenoon, and we go straight to Malta, and hope to arrive there 7 a.m. on Monday next, 16th September. You will not get any letters now for some time, as we shall be four days going to Malta, and letters take four days home from there; so you must not expect any letters for eight or nine days after this one. We have been wonderfully successful so far, and done things never thought of before in the way of fifty vessels being divided into two parts and fighting each other. Tell Reginald [1] the battleships took one another in tow *eight* minutes from the signal with the Fleet steaming ahead at the time, the biggest wire hawsers all used, and chain cables outside [the hawse pipes]. Torpedo nets out in 50 seconds and got in in 1¾ minutes. Really splendid. *But we must look out for the "foot of pride,"* and there is a good deal left to do to-morrow before we finish. We had two destroyers in collision when attacking the battleships, but nothing to signify. No time for more.

Fisher's study of the problems of the Mediterranean Station in war-time had also brought home to him the immense importance of speed. He had found, at first, that few of his ships could steam at high speed without minor breakdowns, which reduced their own speed, and therefore the speed of the whole Fleet. He was able to summarize the result of his two years' attention to this subject as follows:

The various long-distance high-speed runs of the Fleet (on some occasions over forty vessels), without hitch or accident, have furnished all-important experience for war, and are most creditable to the engineer officers and to our engine-room complements. Careful private investigation shows it to be unequalled in any Navy. Constant difficulties and hot bearings are known to occur in the ships of foreign Fleets when a speed over 12 knots is continuous.

Our run from Malta to Trieste, 740 miles with forty-three vessels at 14 knots, arriving to the minute, greatly impressed the Austrian

[1] His son-in-law, Rear-Admiral Reginald Neeld.

Admiral and flabbergasted the French (we got a copy of the telegram sent to Toulon). The runs :

Gibraltar—Aranci,
Salonica—Malta,
Nauplia—Malta,
Malta—Trieste,
Gibraltar—Rapallo—

all are excellent experience.

Although Fisher was quite right in awarding praise to the engine-room staffs, the real reason for the success was the interest he took in the matter himself, and his personal association with the endeavours of all those under him. He marked the above achievement by giving a dinner to all the Chief Engineer Officers of the Fleet, a thing which had never been done before.

His interest in the machinery of his ships is well exemplified by the following incident [1] :

I had never met Lord Fisher until I arrived at Malta at the end of October 1899 in the *Barham*, third-class cruiser, just commissioned at Portsmouth after a refit, including small water-tube boilers. As usual the Dockyard authorities had left us with defects to be made good at Malta, and these developed seriously on the passage out. On arriving at Malta the signal was made, " Keep steam up and prepare to proceed to Port Said." I reported my defects and was ordered to see the Admiral Superintendent at once about them. When I arrived at his office I found the C.-in-C. there, sitting in the Superintendent's chair, with the Dockyard officers in a row before him, and they were directed to work day and night on my vessel's defects until completed.

The Commander-in-Chief then visited *Barham*, and while in the engine-room he asked me what I considered her sea-speed to be. I replied, " Sixteen knots," on which he said, " If you don't do seventeen knots I'll hunt you until you do." His secretary, who was behind me, murmured *sotto voce*, " He'll do it too," and always afterwards the *Barham* was hustled along at seventeen knots.

[1] Admiral Loftus Tottenham.

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Fisher never hesitated to express his views on the unreadiness of the Mediterranean Fleet for war, and, as already stated, wrote freely to Mr. Arnold White on the subject :

I have been paid the great compliment of a letter from Lord Goschen to say that there is a strong Mediterranean flavour in your writing ; and that you might have been supposed to have seen all the public and private letters I have been writing to the Admiralty ever since I assumed command of this great Fleet, on which rests absolutely the fate of the British Empire. I tell you what I said in reply. " Not a midshipman in this Fleet writes to his mother but tells her that we are deficient in cruisers, in destroyers, in repairing ships, ammunition, and store ships and all other essential auxiliaries for a fighting Fleet. What wonder, then, that the man in the street, let alone Mr. Arnold White, is beginning to say, the Army may be bad, but for God's sake keep the Navy ready for instant war. All nations hate us, but as the Austrian General said the other day in his public lecture at Vienna, " What keeps off all hands is, that if a little finger is lifted against us, the British Fleet will pounce."

Our frontiers are the coasts of the enemy and we ought to be there about five minutes after war is declared. I have had excellent letters from Lord Selborne.

P.S.—Please do not put anything about me in the papers, or allude to me in any way, as it will do more harm than good, and spoil my work by exciting envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness.

Lord Charles Beresford, with more zeal than discretion, commenced a Press campaign on the same subject, much against Fisher's advice, and this rebounded back on to Fisher, though he was in no way responsible :

7th April, 1901.

You are right about our friend. The tongue is an unruly member, *especially when it's an Irish Member*. Fitzgerald [1] has had the best of it, and it's all owing entirely to Beresford not obtaining and

[1] Admiral Sir C. P. Fitzgerald.

following good advice (as you rightly remark in your letter), and the worst of it is that he puts *all* of his friends in the wrong box also, as they are obliged to disown him when he makes exaggerated statements. The best thing he can do is to keep quiet for the present; but I fear he won't and will flounder further.

He had previously written in January 1901:

Everyone is very angry with C. B. at the paragraphs put in the paper about his beating A. K. Wilson, which is so stupid of him, as it is not yet decided by the umpires, and is not true. And of course it gets up the backs of the Channel Fleet, which we had avoided. He really is incorrigible.

23rd July, 1901.

I had a long letter from Beresford this morning, telling me of his news from England. He says the whole Cabinet is most furious over the Mediterranean Fleet agitation, but all the same every single item demanded is being conceded, and that I suppose is the real maddening thing—he hears that unless Arnold White had written those personal articles on me, the agitation would not have gone ahead; and that I suppose makes them wild with me, though they must all see that I have nothing whatever to gain from any advertisement, but, on the contrary, all the Admirals would be filled with envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, and this is the fact, so I hear. It certainly has done away with the idea of my going to the Admiralty! Nor do I think it likely that I shall ever get anything else after this. However, I feel that I have done the right thing, and I daresay I shall get along all right on half-pay.

30th July, 1901.

I have had another great point conceded by the Admiralty in the establishment of a Naval War College, which I urged ferociously when they were at Malta. I feel sure Lord Selborne was convinced, but the others would not have it at any price, and now it is announced! Of course —— and —— can both make matters very inconvenient for me, inasmuch as I don't get replies to small matters which don't go to the First Lord. However, it can't be helped.

An important outcome of Lord Selborne's visit to Malta was that it brought him in personal touch

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with Fisher. The result was that the First Lord recognized at once his outstanding ability and marked him down for an early seat on the Board of Admiralty. Fisher, however, was in ignorance of this. We find him writing to the First Lord's Naval Secretary, in the belief that his importunities had destroyed any chance of his going to Whitehall and expressing the hope of being made Commander-in-Chief at Devonport :

17th September, 1901.

I found your pleasant letter on arrival here and just send you a few lines to tell you it [the joint manœuvres] was an unqualified success. A. K. Wilson simply A1 in his new position, and we talked over and made plans for every conceivable eventuality in case of war, so that alone is an immense advantage, and it strikes me, the Channel Admiral being now so intimately associated with the Mediterranean, he really ought to follow on as Commander-in-Chief to keep up the continuity of war arrangements. I told Walter Kerr this the other day, as the point can't help impressing itself when one ponders over the multitude of things we arranged together. This morning I had a newspaper extract given me beginning, " It is now *authoritatively* stated," etc., etc., and goes on to say that Edward Seymour succeeds Walter Kerr, who apparently goes to Devonport when vacant, etc., etc., which is most unkind of Walter Kerr, as I had set my heart on going to Plymouth ! However, as it says " *authoritatively* stated," I feel sure it ain't true and breathe again ! But I warn you, that if you don't send me down to Plymouth you will have your eyes scratched out by the Fisher family ! So look out !

The Devonport appointment would in the ordinary course have meant his practical retirement from active work in the Navy after another three years of service ; but the opportune visit of the First Lord fortunately led to a very different ending. Fisher evidently became more hopeful, for writing again a little later he says :

Not forgetting the story of the Italian Cardinal (sent me by a charming fellow who was Private Secretary at the time to Mr.

Goschen), who said he owed his success in life to never having refused, resigned, or asked for anything, I should like to know if there is any chance of "history repeating itself" when Lord Alcester went from the Mediterranean to Second Sea Lord? I haven't said a word to a soul and don't intend to, and though in rude health, thanks to the Collect for the eighth Sunday after Trinity, yet I think I would like to avoid another summer in the Mediterranean (the last the hottest for forty past years), though very loath to part from all joys of being with such a charming set as we have in the Fleet out here. Now, don't think you have got to commit yourself by writing, and I leave myself to your good judgment. I have always hankered and still do hanker after Plymouth, but "*a bird in the hand*," *etc., etc.* And besides, I really don't care for another summer out here if *easily and prudently avoidable.* I suppose in the ordinary course of events I should be relieved on the 3rd September, the Navy List date for my assuming command! *Don't trouble to answer this.* In any case, you ought to send Wilson to succeed me; he is *the* man without doubt.

Having been ten years at the Admiralty, I think I could hit it off without treading on anyone's toes. However, there's *that Italian Cardinal.* And I believe with Shakespeare that "there's a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will." I think we've dug out pretty well out here since September 1899, and done our best to deserve their Lordships' favourable consideration.

On 31st December, 1901, he wrote again:

Private.

I have written a letter to C. B., of which I have kept a copy, to prevent his, in any way, either quoting me or using my name in any way in his approaching campaign. His intentions are no doubt good, but, as you have heard, "Hell is paved with good intentions"; and I much fear he will put his foot in it, and spoil by injudicious speech the great good he undoubtedly could do in educating outsiders for the good of the Navy.

Having just been offered the post of Second Sea Lord[1] with a seat on the Board of Admiralty, he wrote:

1st March, 1902.

I must confess to you that I think it shows a very Christian spirit in Lord Selborne and his colleagues to invite me into the fold,

[1] He had been promoted to Admiral on 2nd November, 1901.

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considering the way I have pestered and harassed them during the last three years; and they have written me such cordial letters that I am most anxious to do all in my power to get things right without unnecessary friction. It's plain to anyone that Lord Selborne has got his head the right way by his Parliamentary statement. Never before has such a statement been so outspoken or so revolutionary. And he deserved great credit for it. I do hope Beresford will be circumspect in his speech; he has a magnificent opportunity on 14th March; but any indiscretion or exaggeration will be seized on, and the red herring thus provided will be used to draw the public off the scent.

It is not generally known that Fisher might have left the Navy during 1900. It would have been a great disaster for the country; but fortunately it was avoided, as this letter to Mr. Arnold White explains:

28th January, 1901.

Quite unknown to me, when Sir Andrew Noble, the head of the great Elswick firm, was nearly dying lately, the Directors very kindly unanimously proposed to invite me to take his place with his perquisites (that is, Director with £10,000 a year). Although Sir A. Noble has made a wonderful recovery, and the matter is in abeyance at present, it may still come off later on, I think, and in that case I think I might ask for your help. PLEASE DON'T MENTION A WORD OF THIS TO ANYONE, as Noble, who is a lifelong friend, is very sensitive naturally, and I have heard nothing direct except through the indiscretion of two of the Directors. But it's a place I should revel in, and I should immediately set to work to revolutionize the naval fighting by building on speculation a battleship, cruiser, and destroyer on revolutionary principles—oil fuel, turbine propulsion, equal gunfire all round, greater speed than any existing vessels of their class, no masts, no funnels, etc., and I should build them all in eighteen months and sell them for double their cost and "stagger humanity"—and put up the Elswick shares 50 per cent.! NOW, DON'T QUOTE ANY OF THE ABOVE; IT'S COPYRIGHT, and I don't want it to get out! We are going to have splendid work out here this year, I think. We are very busy elaborating our schemes. You see, day by day we are getting more

LORD FISHER'S MOTHER

vessels added to the Mediterranean! That "message" was not unfruitful! Burn this, as I don't want my special shipbuilding hobbies to get wind.

Oil fuel will absolutely revolutionize naval strategy. It's a case of "WAKE UP, ENGLAND," but don't say anything about it, or they will certainly say that I have been writing to you on the subject.

The idea that a private firm should build what would have been an early "Dreadnought" is most interesting, and it is not easy to speculate regarding the results of so bold an action, had it been carried out. It is quite certain, however, that Fisher never foresaw (because Germany at the moment was not looked upon as a source of naval danger) that Germany would have been able to start level with us in building her Dreadnought Fleet. This might have led to a disastrous situation, more especially with no Fisher in the Navy to spur on a Government unwilling to spend money.

The following letter, written from Marienbad before he took up his appointment at the Admiralty, is of great interest, as it clearly shows how Fisher foresaw the advantages of an Anglo-French *Entente*, before it appeared to be a political possibility:

6th August, 1902.

I trust you will not think that I have been unmindful of you because I have neither been to see you nor written to you; but I absolutely have not had the time, so please believe me! I came over here on leave a few weeks ago simply to have a "stand-off" after five years' very hard work. However, I have been pretty busy all the same, and seldom buy less daily than two shillings of postage stamps, and seldom get less on my letters received than 3 or 4 shillings' worth, and nearly all is private correspondence. I am not sure (relying on your friendship) I should be writing to you now except to enclose two paper cuttings in which I want to interest your persuasive mind and pen. I believe the soil is pre-

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pared, but it wants one like you to sow the seed and foster its growth. I casually came across an old number of the *Sunday Sun*, in which I read an excellent article by you on German feeling towards England. I happen to be in a position to corroborate all you said, and more also. The German Emperor may be devoted to us, but he can no more stem the tide of German commercial hostility to this country of ours than Canute could keep the North Sea from wetting his patent-leather boots. It's inherent. Their interests everywhere clash with ours, and their gratitude for all our astounding beneficence to them is nil. It is a fact that, at Hong-Kong, a body of German merchants assembled to drink champagne in gratitude for our reverses in the Transvaal; looking thereby to German ascendency there, through Holland, which they intend to annex. Mind, this is our colony, where we give them every freedom to oust our own merchants and our own steamship lines from their former predominant position.

If you turn to France—in absolutely nothing do we clash, or ever can clash. We hate one another (or rather it is only they who hate us) because "Perfide Albion" is taught in their French nurseries, and the greatest cads in England now travel, and take away our character by behaving like the cads they can't help themselves being. The French newspapers play the "Perfide Albion" game because we are the only nation they can insult with impunity. You know, of course, the well-known story of Napoleon III. All the French editors complained when he told them to be polite to all the continental Powers at some particular epoch; they said they would not be able to sell their papers without there was some abuse in them. "Ah," he said, "but you have always England." I am perfectly convinced if the matter was properly engineered, and the Press of both countries interested in the subject, we should have a vast change, and both enormously to the advantage of France and ourselves. It appears to me the proper thing is to get them to see how intensely important it is for both countries to draw together. I am told 75 per cent. of the French trade is with England (you can find out if this is true). You see the point of that, of course. Does the French nation realize, do you think, what the German Mercantile Marine in its advancing leaps and bounds means? It means another million of French soldiers required in the vicinity of Cherbourg, where a landing is easy. This immense swift German Mercantile Marine did not exist in 1870.

We think of the United States as our friend. (I don't say so

in public, but it's all bosh.[1]) New York only just comes after Berlin in being the largest German city in the world. There are scores of American cities like Milwaukee where there is hardly anyone but Germans.

Since I wrote all this I have had the *Nineteenth Century* for August sent me, and I beg you to read carefully the article on the anti-British movement in Germany. I totally disagree with the writer in objecting to an Anglo-French alliance; he's a German who writes the article. But there are excellent and pithy German extracts you could quote with remarkable effect. Might I suggest to you to consult Sir Charles Dilke on the matter before you take action? I have been told by those who ought to know that there is no man living better acquainted with foreign affairs than he is. I can believe it from his excellent knowledge of naval affairs. He is the one man in the House of Commons who is invariably right on naval affairs, and he is remarkably correct about our lamentable lapse in shipbuilding this year, when we have only two battleships and two armoured cruisers in the Estimates. However, this is a digression.

There is a society, I believe, called the "Entente Cordiale" whose mission is to try to cultivate better feelings between France and England. Perhaps you could exploit to advantage the information they are certain to have collected. Although the French generation of 1870 has passed away, yet deep down in the Frenchman's heart there still lives the word *revanche*, and they remember Gambetta's advice still: "We never mention it, but we never forget it." This feeling might also be exploited.

Whatever people may say to the contrary, our Russian policy of alternating bluster and distrust with an occasional gleam of confidence thrown in has been stupid beyond measure. Russia does not affect our trade and commerce in any degree whatever, and the Afghan bogey has become ludicrous, simply because we can overrun the country sooner than the Russians can. I do sincerely hope that you may have time to give thought and consideration to this very big question; and, if you will permit me to say so, you want some great political authority like Sir Charles Dilke (or Sir Edward Grey, failing him) to godfather the scheme.

May I also call your attention to other newspaper cuttings I enclose, which are well worthy of further ventilation? As you know well, the British public must be kept on being told the same

[1] See Volume II, page 124. Fisher's views altered subsequently.

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thing over and over and over again. There is a merchant of fifty years' experience, a President of a Chamber of Commerce of the whole of the Mediterranean really. I have talked to him at Constantinople when he has not been quite so reticent as in this letter, and he makes it clear as noonday why we are losing our trade. I beg you to try to get an interview with Sir Donald Currie,[1] and ask him the result of his visit to Constantinople last year, and what the Germans were and are doing about South African trade. He came to see me about it at Malta and simply made my blood boil; but perhaps he would not care to be quoted.

I suggest for your consideration, if you think the Anglo-French alliance worth writing about, that it should be impersonal; that is, if it is possible to hide your personality, as it seems to me easy to trace the Roman hand. Under any circumstances, be sure not to mention me or my opinions. "Sinbad," whoever he is in *The Times* of Tuesday, 5th August, had better have left my name out.

This account of the main labours of Fisher when he was Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean has necessarily been somewhat rambling. The work itself was of infinite variety, carried on continuously. Even throughout the hottest summer known for several years at Malta, where the thermometer daily stood at over 90 degrees in the shade and only fell a few degrees at night, his energy did not flag. The work he himself accomplished, not only for his own Fleet but for the Navy at large, was prodigious, and his example gave an impetus to the younger officers that nothing else could have done. On arrival he had found his command a peace Fleet; he left it keyed up to war pitch, in as fine a state of efficiency as any British Fleet before or since. The period was to him one of learning, during which his knowledge of the Navy, of its problems and the solutions, grew vastly, because he consulted, talked, and argued on these matters with

[1] The chairman of the Castle Line, running to South Africa.

everyone under his command whom he considered had any special knowledge.

In view of the great work Fisher had accomplished in the Mediterranean, it might have been anticipated that the Admiralty, and possibly even the Foreign Office, would have written expressing their appreciation of his services during the two years of his command. But apparently this did not occur to either of the two Departments. The British Ambassador at Constantinople,[1] however, wrote:

If you have not actually left, I expect you are on the eve of departure, and I cannot let the moment pass without expressing to you my most sincere thanks for the cordial way in which you have been willing to give me any assistance during the term of your command. My object was to keep things as quiet as possible during the South African troubles, and that I could follow this policy without any fear that it would be put down to timidity was in great measure due to the state of efficiency to which you had brought the Fleet in the Mediterranean and to the fact that foreign Powers knew and fully understood this. Others, perhaps, will reap where you have sown, but this will not lessen your satisfaction any more than it will the gratitude of those public servants who have been watching your labours with keen interest.

The Sultan greatly appreciated your message and says he will always preserve the remembrance of your visit.

A month after he had left the Mediterranean, Fisher commented on these matters to Mr. Arnold White:

I had a very gratifying secret message from the Sultan when I gave up command of the Mediterranean Fleet, implying that the efficiency of the Mediterranean Fleet had preserved the peace of the world during the Boer War (I also had this from another august foreign source), and no doubt he felt that it had preserved him; for had there been a general scramble, he would have lost his situation, I expect. It is interesting to note, however, in this connection that I have not seen or heard anything from Lord

[1] Sir Nicholas O'Conor.

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Lansdowne, or any member of the Government, or received even the usual letter of thanks an Admiral receives on giving up a command. Of course, it's pure absence of mind and unintentional, I feel sure, so I beg you on your honour never to allude to it directly or indirectly. BUT IT'S A STRIKING COMMENTARY on our system, and a proof of the authenticity of the Bible that a prophet is not without honour, etc., when the old Sultan takes the trouble to get a message to reach me *sub rosa*.

Please burn this and never say a word about its contents.

CHAPTER VII

1899—1902

NOTES FOR LECTURES GIVEN TO THE OFFICERS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN FLEET

Effect of increase in gun range—Secrecy—The fighting formation of a fleet—Admiral Fournier's tactics—Immediate readiness—Offensive adopted by the French Fleet—Collingwood and Nelson—Battle ranges at that time—The strategic position in the Mediterranean—Certain maxims—The best guns to be mounted—How and why these views changed—Necessity for educating the ship's company in war conditions—Tactical and strategical advantages of speed—The various arts in war—Requirements of a good Admiral—Luck in war—Early training of officers—Allied Admirals in war.

THE lectures delivered to the officers of the Fleet by Fisher during his period of command in the Mediterranean have been previously alluded to: they are still of considerable interest to the technical student of naval matters. It is not easy for the ordinary naval officer of to-day to appreciate the doubts and difficulties that his predecessors of 1902 had to face; for experience during the war has cleared up most of the points that then were obscure.

The difficulties arose primarily from the increase in gun range and torpedo range that improved methods and materials had gradually rendered practicable. The changes were, however, at first so gradual and so indefinite that the average officer was apt to adopt a "wait-and-see" attitude, especially as it was not proved that really satisfactory hitting could be obtained at the ranges claimed by the enthusiasts.

But the fact that any material increase in battle range was bound to alter the whole of tactics was at once seized on by Fisher, who enlisted the brains of the Fleet to help him to forecast what those changes really involved, and to devise tactics for all natures of craft to meet the new conditions.

As soon as his ideas became clear on any tactical innovation, he disseminated them to his officers by means of a lecture, and then tried them out, as far as peace conditions permitted, with the Fleet at sea. There was therefore no definite sequence of subjects on these lectures, and they followed no prearranged syllabus. This made them all the more attractive. They were, moreover, freely garnished with aphorisms and maxims, which arrested attention and stimulated memory. The stories he used as illustrations were always witty and to the point, mostly impromptu and therefore not included in his notes; while his distinctive style of addressing his hearers, a mixture of earnestness and humour, the inimitable gift of a born *raconteur*, drove his lessons home.

Extracts from the notes he made for the lectures are included in this chapter, mainly because they form an historical record of his work and contain material that could be used for lectures to young officers even to-day. They are good reading, even for a person devoid of technical naval knowledge.

One subject on which opinion was then divided was that of official secrecy. The Admiralty was, and always has been, the sanctuary of secrecy. Even Commanders-in-Chief were wont to preserve a deadly silence as regards their plans for war; and it was with the greatest difficulty that any information of importance could be extracted from them or the Admiralty

in a form that enabled it to be communicated to officers generally.

Fisher girded at these methods, and gave his listeners the following parable :

There are three types of secrecy :
I. The Ostrich.
II. The Red Box.
III. The Real Thing.

I. The ostrich buries his head in the sand of the desert when pursued by his enemy ; and, because he can't see the enemy, concludes the enemy can't see him ! Such is the secrecy of the secretive and detestable habit which hides from our own officers what is known to all the other Navies.

II. The secrecy of the red box is that of a distinguished Admiral who, with great pomp, had his red dispatch-box, supposed to contain the most secret plans, carried before him, like the umbrella of an African king. But one day the box unfortunately capsized, burst open, and the contents that fell out were copies of *La Vie Parisienne*.

Such, it is feared, is the secrecy of those wonderful detailed plans for war which we hear of in secret drawers, to be brought out when " the time comes," and when no one has any time to study them—supposing, that is, they ever existed ; and, remember, it is detailed minute attention to minutiæ and the consideration of trifles which spell success.

III. Lastly, there is the legitimate secrecy and secretiveness of hiding, even from your dearest friend, the moment and the nature of your rush at the enemy, and which particular one of all the variety of operations *you have previously practised with the Fleet* you will bring into play ! But owing to this practice, all your Captains will instantly know your mind and intentions, for you will hoist the signal, or spark the wireless message, Plan A, or Plan B . . . or Plan Z.

It is absolutely necessary that the principal officers of the Fleet should be thoroughly acquainted with the whole scope of the probable war operations, and *saturated* with the views of their Commander-in-Chief ; so that they know what best to do next if one step goes wrong. They must also be prepared to provide against unforeseen contingencies ; and to this end, in each ship,

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we should have our War Committee—the Captain, the Second-in-Command, the Navigator, the Gunnery, Torpedo, and Wireless Officers, etc.

What is the vital principle of war? It is the same afloat as ashore. To bring a preponderance of force to bear on a portion of the enemy before it can be reinforced. Nelson at Cape St. Vincent, the Nile, and Trafalgar, and Napoleon in the field.

Prayer for the unready and unpractised Fleet!—

"Give peace in our time, O Lord!"

It may seem extraordinary, to the naval officer of to-day, that so late as 1900 considerable differences of opinion existed as to the best fighting formation for a modern Fleet. In the olden days of sailing ships, single line ahead was the one and only recognized formation; although, it is true, Nelson at Trafalgar for a special reason arranged his Fleet in two parallel lines. The advent of steam, which permitted any desired course to be steered independent of the wind, had introduced the belief that advantage might be gained by dividing the Fleet into several units, and in some way manœuvring these so as to obtain a concentration of fire on a portion of the enemy's line. Double quarter-line (a formation such as wild ducks use when flying) was favoured by Admiral Fournier, the acknowledged tactician of the French Navy; while others suggested two parallel lines. The real and important factor to be considered in selecting a Fleet formation for action is, however, how best to bring the maximum of gun fire to bear on the enemy. Which formation gives to all the ships the widest and most uninterrupted arc of maximum gun fire? The only possible answer is, a single line of ships, called technically, "line ahead."

Fisher had had the arguments in favour of single-

line formation[1] put before him in 1899; but it was some time before he definitely made up his mind finally to adopt it, together with the two golden rules for fighting a Fleet action: (1) Use superiority of speed for choosing the range, and (2) Whenever the enemy turns, turn also.

Closely allied to the question of the fighting formation of his Fleet was the problem of defending that Fleet from the attack of torpedo craft. No serious consideration had been given to this before Fisher took it in hand. He seized on and developed the principle of using destroyers and other small vessels to cruise with the Fleet in order to form a torpedo screen, and established the principle that a battle Fleet was a composite assemblage of vessels of various classes.

The immense importance of instant readiness for war was ever present in his mind, and was at all times being emphasized by him. In the notes he wrote:

> Immense importance of constant readiness at all times must never be forgotten. A Fleet that is always ready to go to sea at an hour's notice is a splendid national life-preserver! Here comes in the water-tube boiler; without previous notice or even an inkling, we have been ready in an hour with water-tube boiler ships. You can't exaggerate this! One bucket of water ready on the spot, in the shape of an instantly ready Fleet, will stop the conflagration of war which all the fire brigades of the world won't stop a little later on. Never forget, from the very nature of sea fighting, that an initial naval disaster is irretrievable, irreparable, eternal. Naval Colensos have no Paardebergs.

[1] It is interesting to note that since the war the same questions have again been raised. Backed up by the argument based on the extra range of vision given by the aeroplane, the idea of breaking up the Fleet into sections and using them to envelop the other Fleet (whatever that may mean) has once more found favour among some of the younger officers.

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Suddenness is the secret of success at sea, because suddenness is practicable; and remember that rashness may be the very height of prudence. How very rash Nelson was at the Nile to go in after dark and fight the French Fleet with no chart of Aboukir! The French intercepted dispatches state that they expected him to wait till next morning (so as to sound and buoy the shoals of Aboukir), when they would have been better prepared, as they had men ashore.

But you must be sure of your Fleet, and they must be sure of you! Every detail previously thought out. Trust no one. (Like the story of the Yankee barber who, when asked to give credit, said, "To trust is to bust, and to bust is hell.") Make the best of things as they are. Criminal to wait for something better. We strain at the gnat of perfection and swallow the camel of unreadiness.

He always in those days before our *rapprochement* with France had his eye on the French Fleet and their manœuvres. One of his many mottoes was, "*Fas est ab hoste doceri.*" The reports of the French manœuvres were closely studied by him, and the main lessons he learned were introduced into one of his lectures. One paragraph of the report that struck him greatly was that in which Admiral Fournier remarked, regarding the French Fleet:

An immense step in advance appears to have been taken since last year. There is no longer any question of blockade, of waiting for events, of trying to gain time; the policy of the offensive to the very end seems, at last, to have gained the upper hand in French naval strategy. For the first time in the annals of the French Navy, we see manœuvres so arranged that the French force has to play the rôle of taking the offensive. The mere fact that, in the scheme of the manœuvres, the French Fleet is to leave Toulon at the commencement of hostilities, the Admiral being at liberty to go where he pleases, denotes a new policy. The policy of the offensive has evidently prevailed; and a revolution has been wrought in the French Navy which is half the way to victory.

Fisher therefore found himself face to face with a

Photo: J. Mallia & Co., Valletta

VICE-ADMIRAL SIR JOHN FISHER, K.C.B.

Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Fleet

far more advanced strategy on the part of the French than had previously existed; this, in the Mediterranean, would in future mean a struggle on the part of each Fleet to maintain the offensive. The notes for this lecture are characteristic:

> Some lessons from Trafalgar in passing. The sacred fire never burned in Collingwood. Nelson, with the instincts of genius, intended the Fleet to anchor; turning the very dangers of the shoals of Trafalgar into a security. Collingwood, simply a naval machine, and never having been his own master all his life, and not being a genius, thought a shoal was a thing to be avoided, and consequently wrecked those ships which were unfitted to cope with the gale, and to weather these shoals. Collingwood ought to have had the moon given to him for his crest, for all his glory was reflected from Nelson, the sun of glory. Collingwood was an old woman.

This is a good example of Fisher's method of driving home a point by deliberately indulging in provocative exaggeration.

We find in these same lecture-notes some data that fix the effective ranges of the guns of the Fleet at that period. He gives them as follows: heavy guns with telescopic sights, 4,000 to 3,000 yards; heavy guns without telescopic sights, 2,000 yards. Later on ranges of 5,000 yards are talked of. The maximum range at which a form of battle firing had been carried out by the French, at the *Surcouf*, an old ship converted into a target, was stated to be 4,375 yards. This gradual advance in range was upsetting all the old ideas of battle, and was to culminate in the ranges of 13,000 and even 15,000 yards at the Battle of Jutland. The torpedo, too, had increased its range by a sudden leap to 3,000 or 4,000 yards; thus threatening the battleship with destruction in a fleet action unless

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the gun ranges were pushed up. Rumours of firings carried out by the French and Italian ships at 7,000 yards came later and impelled our going also to increased ranges. But to continue our extracts :

Why the Mediterranean is the strategic centre of the world.

(*a*) France is the immediate opponent of England for the present.

(*b*) France in the Mediterranean occupies geographically and by nature the advantageous strategic position.

(*c*) France in the Mediterranean is close to her principal resources, while England has only Malta with one dock for battleships.

(*d*) In the Mediterranean all reinforcements are flanked the whole route from England to Malta by French and Algerian coasts, with their highly organized torpedo-boat system.

(*e*) In the Mediterranean France can do any of five things. In the Channel she can only do one thing. So we have to prepare for five eventualities in the Mediterranean.

(*f*) In the Mediterranean France has an ally emerging from the Black Sea, and that ally practically in possession of the Dardanelles and a new port at Bourgas. The Baltic freezes, the Black Sea does not.

(*g*) In the Mediterranean France, acting on interior lines, can strike at pleasure at Malta or Gibraltar, or at a force passing between those places.

(*h*) The Mediterranean is the French fighting-ground, because of the enormous influence of Bizerta, now a first-class naval base with its principal torpedo-boat station only ten hours distant from Malta.

(*i*) The strategic conditions of the Mediterranean rest on its geographical conditions, and you can no more move the vital naval strategic spot elsewhere than you can move Mount Vesuvius.

N.B.—Instant action.

Frontiers of England the coasts of the enemy. We ought to be there five minutes before war breaks out.

Nelson said, " Only numbers can annihilate." Napoleon afterwards said, " God is on the side of big battalions."

No use the British Empire having two or three more battleships than the French and Russians, etc., etc., as so stupidly argued by those who ought to know better. You want a sufficiency of battleships left over, intact, after settling with the first hostile combina-

tion, as to be ready to deal with, say, our German cousin, who has kept neutral ready to bag the booty.

He did not hesitate to emphasize his views on the necessity for stern measures in war. There is always, in peace-time, a tendency for leniency to creep into the theory of our behaviour in war, when the utmost severity should prevail. Fisher rammed home this fact with his usual exaggeration. He laid down to his officers that " the essence of war is violence," that " moderation in war is imbecility," and as a general rule :

(1) Give no quarter.
(2) Take no prisoners.
(3) Sink everything.
(4) No time for mercy.
(5) *Frappez vite et frappez fort.*
(6) *L'audace, l'audace, l'audace, toujours l'audace.*

N.B.—There really is no time for mercy, prizes, or prisoners.
Nelson was thirty-nine years old at the battle of the Nile.
As age increases, audacity leaks out and caution comes in.
Peace brings with it the reign of old men.

He ended this string of maxims by referring to the motto on board the destroyer *Boxer*, *Ut veniant omnes* (" Let 'em all come "). This, he proclaimed, " was the right spirit." " In war shoot the pessimists—they will lose us the victory. They are fearful enough in peace-time."

It is interesting to note how his views regarding the proper type of battleship varied with the progress of long-range shooting. In the following notes for a lecture, principles are enunciated which are exactly the reverse of those embodied later in the *Dreadnought*. The reasons adduced for the views he then held were perfectly valid at the moment. But as range increased

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a totally different array of reasons completely upset the conclusions previously arrived at.

"Do we," he asked, "arrange the armament to meet proposed modes of fighting? Doesn't it sometimes look, with so many of each sort of gun being installed, as if you were peopling the ark and wanted representatives of all calibres? The design of fighting ships *must follow the mode of fighting* instead of *fighting being subsidiary to and dependent on the design of ship.*"

Here we have the germ of thought that led him to expound the views that follow; and, later, to reverse these in favour of the design of the *Dreadnought*. It sounds a commonplace now, but never before had *methods of fighting* been considered in ship design, except in certain sporadic and special-type ships, such as the *Fleet Rams*, *Polyphemus*, and similar vessels. The weight of shell thrown by the broadside had been the chief criterion by which strength of a ship was measured, irrespective, to a great extent, of the calibre of the guns. The heaviest gun that could be carried was selected, and as many of these as could conveniently be mounted were installed in the available space. The remaining space was filled up with guns of a smaller calibre. But when Fisher seriously considered battle tactics, he soon realized that the best tactics were fixed, while the design of ships could be varied at will. At that time he was still far from the *Dreadnought* design; nor was it until 7,000 and 8,000 yards became probable future battle ranges that an all-one-calibre main armament became a necessity. At the period of which we are speaking the best form of mixed armament appeared to him to be the *smallest large gun* (*perhaps* 10½ *inch*) and *the largest small gun* (7½ *inch*). Increase in battle range was, however, quickly

moulding naval opinion, and within three years views had utterly changed, and Fisher was then ardently championing the view that the armament should consist of the *largest large gun* and the *smallest* (*within limits*) *small gun*. But in 1902, when he gave his lecture, his opinion, and that of the most advanced naval thinkers, was that, " in these days of very rapid movement, the huge gun, firing comparatively *slowly*, is as obsolete as the foot-soldiers in the Boer War." He explained the reasons for this assertion, and undoubtedly they were absolutely sound *at the moment*, though each and every one was to be upset within three years. Here is his argument :

By many, a 10-inch gun of the newest type and, say, 3,300 feet initial velocity is preferred to those of larger calibre. Why ? Because it admits of so much more rapid firing. There is said to be a 10-inch gun, now feasible, which would be practically a quick-firer, and all the weights involved admit of hand working if the mechanism or electric motors fail, where, in these circumstances, the heavier calibres would offer great difficulties.

It is a most serious thing as to when your 12-inch or larger guns shall be fired in action, because you have to reflect when they will be ready to be fired again. You have to reflect on the possibility of a miss-fire. Miss-fires ought not to happen, but they do ! So the problem is to fix the smallest large gun to put at each end of the ship, and the largest small quick-firing gun to be put elsewhere with the largest arc of fire and the best view.

When the *Royal Sovereign* at Nauplia carried out, in 1900, an imaginary action, it was evident to all present that we should be compelled, in an action, to rely almost completely on the independent action of the different guns. The noise, and the unavoidable, though *orderly*, confusion, will be such as to render any verbal directions or bridge sounds inaudible or indistinguishable. Therefore we must see how all-important it is incessantly to practise and educate our ships' companies to meet these conditions.

" Have we personally selected the best men for the important stations in action ? " he asked. " Have

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we arranged for a reserve of men at these places? Have we weeded out all the duffers where great intelligence is required, and not wasted highly educated labour in passing up ammunition or turning on a fire-main? Victory will depend on the previous attention to minute trifles, and victory can be previously organized at sea almost with the certainty of a game of chess, provided everyone in the Fleet possesses the necessary intelligent knowledge of all that has to be done."

He recognized speed to be the main factor in all tactical problems, and strategically also of vast importance. The designers of our ships up to that time had been inclined to look on speed as a factor that should be kept *equal* to that in other Navies, but one of rather less importance than armament. Armament loomed large in all comparative returns, where "weight of broadside" was given pre-eminence. An extra knot of speed meant a very considerable increase in the size and cost of a ship, and showed to little advantage in comparative statistics. There was always the argument, "What is the use of only *one* knot in speed?" for it seemed very little for the expenditure involved. But when an Admiral came to make real plans, in the way that Fisher did, and to visualize all probable contingencies, a knot of speed loomed very large indeed. It might mean the difference between being able to bring an enemy to action and seeing him escape, or it might just enable a weak detachment to avoid a stronger force of the enemy. Further, it might give an Admiral the choice of range during an action, and deprive his opponent of the initiative in that respect.

The destroyers of those days were rather fragile, while the Navy was short of cruisers. In one of his

lectures he brought these points out well, but without criticizing the Admiralty. Speaking of the various arts of war—" the art of perspective in war," " the art of sacrificing a sprat to catch a whale," " the art of proportion," " the art of discrimination," and lastly " the art of not wasting time "— he proceeded:

All these points are lectures in themselves; but here are two illustrations:

I. Don't use a Nasmyth hammer or hydraulic press to crack walnuts. A nut-cracker is the proper instrument. *Moral.*—Don't use battleships to do the work of cruisers.

II. Don't use razors to chop wood. An axe is the proper implement! *Moral.*—Don't use destroyers as if they were as strong and as self-reliant as battleships.

But, you ask, how is it on this station we did thus improperly use battleships and destroyers?

I. Because we had no armoured cruisers available, so were forced to use the swiftest battleships.

II. Because we had an insufficiency of cruisers, and so destroyers, instead of " laying to " in bad weather, had to be forced against heavy seas to carry information that should have been taken by cruisers.

In another lecture he spoke of the qualities of a good Admiral:

Lord Goschen said, " We must ultimately place our reliance on Providence and a good Admiral." An initial naval disaster being from the nature of sea-fights irreparable, irretrievable, and eternal, we must run no risk whatever that can humanly be avoided of maritime Colensos and Spion Kops, through the development of mental paralysis at the crucial moment of battle in our Admiral-in-Chief Command, which mental paralysis may possibly have been previously indicated in peace manœuvres.

He therefore laid down some of the requirements in a good Admiral:

Physical endurance: so presumably he should not be too old. Collingwood remarked even in his day that " Admirals need to be made of iron."

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Quick decision, or he'll never get through his work. In battles in these days there are only moments for decision when formerly there were hours for discussion with his Staff.

Self-confidence. If you don't believe in yourself, other people won't. Too late to ask advice when you are an Admiral—you ought to know all about it.

Immutability. Never alter. The Admiral who hesitates is lost. In the small things of life it is delightful to make plans and change your mind ; but in a Fleet it's fatal.

Fearlessness. There's a rashness that is prudence in war. Though night was coming on and unknown shoals abounded, Nelson at the Nile went for them at once. It was the youth and enthusiasm of Gambetta which saved the French in their extremity !

Napoleon dictated these words at St. Helena : " You must be young to command an Army [or Fleet]. It needs high enterprise, dash, and spirit, and so much good luck."

Good luck ! What is good luck ? It's a careful previous calculation of what you will leave to chance ! So that it is almost a certainty what the result will be ! Have you never heard the expression, " That fellow has the luck of the Devil " ? The fact is, he puts himself in the Devil's place and calculates accordingly ! So he succeeds. No more splendid saying than that " there is nothing succeeds like success."

When Nelson went into battle the victory was half-won before a shot was fired ! An initial surmounting of difficulties in his early career got him the reputation of being a lucky officer (meaning a successful one), and so he got the " halo " of never failing, and the confidence thus inspired was half-way to victory.

We have glorious traditions, but there are some terrible traditions which weight us as they did the scribes and Pharisees ! Thus some cabalistic charm is supposed to be imparted to the Fleet if it never lets go an anchor and remains continuously at sea. So there was in the old days of masts and yards ! But now all is altered. The one thing now is to keep as many of your fires unlit as possible, and therefore clean and fit for high speed, and thus also economize coal ; and also keep all your machinery more or less in cotton-wool for the spurt when your cruisers and destroyers will bring you word that the enemy has put to sea. Go to sea every day and in all weathers by all means, but there's nothing in the fact nowadays of always being at sea, and never letting go your anchor.

Dealing with the early training of officers, he wrote :

The usual motto, " Silence," or " Deeds, not words," you will see ornamenting some conspicuous place in the ship.

It has been said by landsmen that the most striking feature to them in a British man-of-war when at sea is the noiseless, ceaseless, sleepless, yet unobtrusive energy that characterizes everyone and everything on board. If so, we sailors don't notice it, and it is the result of nature. Gales of wind, sudden fogs, immense speed, the much multiplied dangers of collisions and wrecks from these phenomenal speeds, as in destroyers and even in large ships—all these circumstances react automatically on all on board, and are nature's education by environment. There is no place for the unthinking or lethargic. He is a positive danger. Every individual in a man-of-war has his work cut out. " Think and act for yourself," is the motto of the future, not " Let us wait for orders." This applies with greater force to sea- than to land-fights. No mountains delay us, and, as the Scripture says, " the way of a ship is trackless." The enemy will suddenly confront us as an apparition. At every moment we must be ready. Can this be acquired by grown men ? No ; it is the force of habit. You must commence early. Our Nelsons and Benbows began the sea-life when they first put their breeches on ! The brother of the Black Prince (John of Gaunt) joined the Navy, and was in a sea-fight when he was ten years of age. Far exceeding anything known to history does our future Trafalgar depend on promptitude and rapid decision, and on every eventuality having been foreseen by those in command. But these attributes cannot be acquired late in life, nor by those who have lived the life of cabbages ! So begin early and work continuously.

The following extract will appropriately conclude this chapter :

I was once told by a Cabinet Minister that I quite overlooked the fact of our having Allies. I don't know quite where they are at present, and as regards sea-fighting they would be a d——d nuisance. I always say that I feel sure that Nelson rubbed his hands with glee when he saw the French Admiral at Trafalgar signalling to the Spanish Admiral vainly endeavouring to get his ships into their places. N.B.—You can't shoot an Allied Admiral !

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I have prepared a polite letter to the Allied Admiral, the English translation of which is, "For God's sake keep out of the way. You can come in afterwards and pick up the pieces." We can't fight all the world; but this is a good point for you to make: a 2½-power standard would give you a Fleet not too unwieldy if properly constituted and ably commanded, and kept organized for immediate action for striking those sharp, quick, decisive blows such as Napoleon struck at the unwieldy and scattered forces of his enemy. And so it comes now to your fighting Fleets being ready to fight; they must be looking for the enemy, not looking for reinforcements! And what does this mean? It wants a big thinking department. That's the first thing. You want to begin "ab ovo" (as the Latin Grammar says). It's a case of "This is the house that Jack built," one thing follows another. Rightly administered with the 2½-power standard we might say, "Ut veniant omnes" ("Let 'em all come!")

CHAPTER VIII

1902—1904

On from the " Victory's " deck he has moved to a noble fate,
He governed the sea with wisdom, and with honour he served the State.
HAROLD BEGBIE.

Second Sea Lord—His scheme of naval education—The value of Press assistance—The *Britannia*—The old-class Engineer—Improvements in status—Agitation—The reason for common entry—Object to be attained in naval education—Value of character—The engineering course—The Interview Committee—The curriculum—The Marine officer—Attempts to kill the scheme—His speech at the Royal Academy banquet—Appointed to the Portsmouth Command—The Esher Committee—War Office reorganization—The Committee of Imperial Defence—Recommendations—His belief in submarine boats—Lady Fisher and the *Victory*—The King pays a visit—The incident of the cook—Interview with Lord Selborne—His flag hauled down for the last time—Postscript: Lord Charles Beresford's appreciation of naval education scheme.

ON 5th June, 1902, Fisher returned to the Admiralty, this time as Second Sea Lord. In this appointment he dealt mainly with the personnel of the Navy. He was therefore afforded the opportunity of launching his scheme for the revision of the education of the younger officers. His proposals were radical, and the remainder of the Board was decidedly conservative; he had considerable difficulty in persuading his colleagues of the soundness of his scheme and the desirability of the change. In fact, one day, after a rather argumentative Board meeting, he summed up what had happened, in a chaffing way to his secretary, saying: " I never knew that Admirals could be so rude to one

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another." Eventually, however, he carried the day. The doubts of the Board were reflected to a great extent in the Navy. He had enthusiastic supporters, but also many doubters. The younger and more liberal-minded of the officers were for his scheme. Lord Charles Beresford was enthusiastically in favour of the proposals as they then stood. He wrote to Fisher, telling him that he (Lord Charles) had been asked to lead the opposition in the Navy, and that he had replied telling his correspondent that he and his friends were a lot of " antiquated mummies, and that he would like to stuff them, and set them up in a museum in England." His appreciation of the scheme is given in a postscript to this chapter.

Fisher also fought hard for a more sensible distribution of work between the Sea Lords. He considered that the Second Sea Lord should deal with everything that affected officers below the rank of Post-Captain, instead of this being partly the duty of the First Sea Lord. It has been said that, while fighting this question, he at times wore a label on his back inscribed, " I have no work to do " ; but then Fisher's idea of work varied considerably from that held by the usual run of officers.

He was the first of our Admirals to make an intelligent use of the Press for the benefit of the Navy. He was convinced that, in order to get his various reforms understood and appreciated by the country, it was necessary to have the Press primed with the whole truth about them, and not merely with a smattering of half-truths. We have seen how, even as a Commander, he commended this system. In the Mediterranean later he amplified it ; and he did not hesitate to keep in touch with certain journalists

whom he could trust, and to give them as much information as official secrecy permitted. The Navy is by tradition averse to any dealings with the Press, and newspaper correspondents have always been treated with suspicion. Nearly everything the naval officer usually read in the papers about the Navy he knew to be untrue; and this engendered a feeling of distrust not unmixed with contempt; it did not occur to him that the reason for the inaccuracies was the denial to the Press of accurate information. This superior attitude has, however, been somewhat relaxed ever since the Admiralty allowed authorized correspondents to stay on board ships for the annual manœuvres. The choice of correspondents, like the late Sir John Thursfield, for example, who was one of the first to be accorded the privilege, was most wise and did much to remove the old prejudices.

Fisher welcomed publicity for his schemes, but discountenanced any mention of his own name. He knew well that he was singled out by some of the senior officers for disparagement; for his rise had been so meteoric that it was bound to create jealousies among those over whose heads he had passed. To them he was chiefly a self-advertiser, who had risen by stamping on the shoulders of others, and crushing them in the process; he was an Oriental, the son of a Cingalese Princess with the Eastern failings, and quite ruthless and remorseless where his own interests were concerned; and every mention of his name in the Press added fuel to the fire. It was sufficient to read that Fisher had fathered a scheme for them at once to condemn it. Throughout his correspondence with journalistic friends we find him constantly urging them to keep his name out of the papers, and to

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ascribe all the changes and reforms to the Board of Admiralty.

Fisher could not, however, keep in touch with every newspaper; nor did every editor or proprietor look on him with a favourable eye. Accusations of journalistic favouritism were made, which were to a certain extent true; for, naturally, those journalists who were ardent supporters of his schemes received more information than others who were only lukewarm, or those who were opponents. In the Navy this "dabbling with the Press," as it was called, met with disfavour. Fisher felt that publicity was essential to success, and having gauged the consequent disadvantages, he boldly faced them. For the remainder of his term of office a violent campaign was conducted against him in the Press; at the same time those who believed in him took up the cudgels in his favour; the result was that the British public was thoroughly mystified. Nevertheless the majority of his countrymen came to recognize, through all this dust and clamour, that he was a great man working hard for the good of the Navy and the country, and throughout the campaign of vilification Fisher retained the confidence of a large portion of the general public. Had it been otherwise he could not have carried through his great work.

The system in vogue when Fisher entered the Navy, whereby a youngster of thirteen or fourteen years of age was sent to a harbour depot ship on joining the Service, was essentially a bad one. These depot ships were officered mainly by men who had been failures at sea. The gunroom mess had for its members chiefly old mates and masters, who, for various causes, had failed to obtain promotion. It is impossible to con-

ceive a worse atmosphere for a young lad to have been landed in immediately on leaving home influence.

In 1867 a great reform was introduced by the establishment of a special school for young officers on entering the Navy. This was finally set up in an old line-of-battleship, the *Prince of Wales*, renamed the *Britannia*, at Dartmouth. A second hulk, the *Hindostan*, was added, and accommodation for about 150 cadets was provided. The naval cadets remained here for two years, during which time they were taught the theory and practice of navigation, elementary mathematics, French, drawing, and practical seamanship.

In the last decade of last century attention was called to the uneconomical and insanitary conditions that were inherent in the use of old wooden ships as living-quarters for officers and men in harbour. A scheme was launched for the provision of barracks at all the large ports ; and, inevitably, the *Britannia* was also abolished, and a magnificent college built at Dartmouth, which was opened in 1903. This marked a further step forward in naval education.

One apparently small, but in reality great, alteration in detail of the daily life of the cadets was introduced which was productive of most beneficial results. The discipline of the cadets had for many years been supervised by ship's Corporals, that is to say ship's police, who had risen from the ranks, and who were not officers, neither had they the training nor the tradition of officers. It is true that in the *Britannia* there were two Lieutenants, each of whom was nominally responsible for half of the cadets ; but they had very little to do with the cadets except to award punishments ; a class of supervision not likely to ingratiate, nor to

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inspire confidence. Under the new régime this was altered. Special Lieutenants were selected who had the qualities which would be likely to make them friends of the boys, and lead to proficiency in games. One was detailed for each " term " of cadets, and the cadets were placed directly under their Lieutenant. From the day a boy joined, therefore, he had instilled into him the fact that he was an officer, and that he had joined a profession of great traditions and high ideals, and that it was up to him to behave as became a naval officer. This was exactly the sort of idealism which appealed to boys, with the result that the morale of the naval cadet is practically unsurpassed elsewhere among boys of a like age.

The curriculum at Dartmouth was not far different from that of the old *Britannia*, except that a good deal of sailing-ship seamanship was dropped, and more teaching of engineering and machinery introduced; but the training was still essentially that of a sea-officer, and not that of an engineer.

One of Fisher's maxims was, " The art of government is the intelligent anticipation of agitation "; so that when, on his advent to the office of Second Sea Lord, he found that a very formidable agitation on the part of the Engineer officers to assume executive functions was in full swing, he immediately took steps to deal drastically with the matter and so forestall further trouble.

It is necessary here to look back into the history of the Navy to the time when steam-engines were first installed for propulsion. Qualified Engineers had to be entered to take charge of the machinery. Marine engineering ashore was hardly beyond its infancy, and the men who then had knowledge of engines and boilers

were only those whom we should now designate as "engine drivers." They were mostly worthy, reliable mechanics, but the majority had no pretensions to be what was popularly called "gentlemen." The Navy had been, ever since the old days of "gentlemen volunteers," an aristocratic service; and the difference, therefore, between the early Engineers and the executive officers of that period was most marked. The senior Engineer officer entered the wardroom; but the junior Engineer officers messed together in a separate Engineers' mess; this further tended to accentuate the social distinction between the two branches.

When it became evident that steam must become the main motive power of warships, steps were taken to improve the class of Engineer officers, and youths were specially entered at an early age and trained in an old three-decker named the *Marlborough*. Care was taken in the selection of the youngsters, nominations being given to boys who had done best in the Dockyard Schools and other analogous institutions, so that in this way many men of considerable brilliance joined the Service; to mention only a few, Sir W. White and Sir Philip Watts (for Naval Constructors then entered as Engineer Students), Sir John Durston, Sir John Corner, and many others. But although great improvement in social status had been effected, the average Engineer officer was still socially below the executive officer. The Engineers' mess was abolished at this time, and the Engineer officers joined either the wardroom or the gunroom; and by this means the social position of the Engineer officers was raised further. On board ship the two branches were excellent friends; but in social functions, and especially

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those which included wives and families, relations were apt to be rather strained. The gulf between the two branches was never thoroughly bridged over, even after a new and very superior class of Engineer officer rose up in the Navy.

It may at first sight seem to be snobbish to lay so much stress on social manners and standing; but in dealing with men and affairs matters have to be legislated for as they are, and not as, theoretically, we might wish them to be.

Fisher was thoroughly alive to all this; in fact, in pressing his proposals on the Board of Admiralty he told the following story which exactly illustrates the matter:

> A Chief Engineer officer by the name of Brown worried the First Lieutenant of a ship (a great friend of mine) to exasperation by telling him that he ranked before him when on shore or when going in to dinner. "Look here, Brown," said the First Lieutenant, "it don't matter what rank the Admiralty like to give you, and I don't care a damn whether you walk in to dinner before me or after me; but all I know, Brown, is that my Ma will never ask your Ma to tea!"

As the social standing of the Engineer officer improved, he inevitably desired that all distinctions between himself and the executive officer should be abolished, and that thereby his status on board of a ship should be raised. This led to demands being put forward, backed strongly by the various Engineering Societies and their representatives in Parliament, that the Engineer officer should be given executive rank, and that his uniform should be similar to that of the executive branch. The extremists demanded that when a ship was in harbour the Engineer officer, if he were senior to the Second-in-Command, should take over

the command of the ship. Of course the demands were, at the time, absurd. In reality they meant calling an Engineer officer what he was not, and dressing him in a uniform which disguised his calling; but the agitation was one that had to be reckoned with. The solution, in Fisher's opinion, lay in entering both the Engineer and executive officers in one common entry, and educating both in navigation and in engineering knowledge, so that all differences in status would disappear. The Engineer officer then would have sufficient training to take command of a ship if necessary; and, in case of need, the deck officer could lend a hand in the engine-room. The scheme was bold, but essentially a practical one, though it was destined to arouse the most violent opposition. As we shall see later, society was canvassed and told that in future their sons, if they entered the Navy, would no longer be officers, but would be liable, at the will of the Admiralty, to spend their lives with their faces daubed with coal-dust and up to their elbows in oil, and, in fact, would become engine-drivers.

Fisher's views were set forth in a letter to Mr. Arnold White:

> The old navigating class in the Navy, it was splendid, but dissatisfied, and unrecognized. They were extracted from a different social stratum and couldn't mix any more than oil and vinegar, and were kept in separate bottles all their time in the Service. But a magician arose and said, "Let's have no class distinctions! Enter them all as midshipmen, and those who show an aptitude for navigating they will take it up"; and the result has been splendid; and it's a matter of fact that fewer ships have been lost or grounded since this scheme came into maturity than ever known before in the history of the Navy. *So let it be with the Engineers.* Enter them as midshipmen in the Naval College at Dartmouth, put 'em all into the same bottle! and at a suitable time select those for engineering duties, give high special pay,

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higher than we now give to the Gunnery, or the Torpedo, or the Navigating Lieutenants, and you will then have no lack of Engineer officers of a higher calibre perhaps than at present.

When the approval of the Board of Admiralty had been obtained, Fisher increased the number of cadets that were entered annually, and revised entirely their course of training.

The first point to consider was what were the basic subjects essential to the education and equipment of a naval officer. Fisher's idea of these requirements is clearly given in the following note, endorsed by him :

The rôle that a naval officer has to fulfil is a varied one ; professional acquirements are of great importance, but many other qualities are essential. In distant parts of the globe he has to represent his nation ; and is often called on to exhibit considerable diplomatic and social qualities. Essentially, therefore, his training should be broad and liberal ; and everything with a narrowing tendency should be avoided. His hands require training as much as his brain ; and constant and early contact with men is essential to encourage self-reliance and command. His training should be a practical one. Judgment, perception, and initiative should be fostered, and care taken to avoid such studies as tend to constrict or fetter these qualities.

The general effect of education on character is not perhaps much studied ; since success in specialities of learning carries with it qualities of character suitable to the prosecuting of those special duties. A profound study of mathematics or science carries with it habits of accuracy that are apt to stifle rapid judgment ; and so it is with all educational subjects : some broaden ; others, if too closely adhered to, tend to narrow it ; but all have a direct influence on character.

In the Navy the first object in view is to give an officer a good general education, so as to enable him to fill his station in life ; next to supply him with knowledge of the theory and use of the ship on which he lives, and of the whole of its equipment ; and, during the acquisition of this learning, to develop his aptness to command, and his initiative to its full extent, always taking care that theory is kept complementary to practice. Evidently the

present-day and future naval officer must be a practical marine engineer; he lives in one vast machine; every day he handles machinery; he must be fed on mechanism and learn its details. But, on the other hand, he is not required to be an engine designer. Normally he has to work and repair engines, not design them. At the same time he must be, above all things, a seaman, and possess that peculiar knowledge which only wind and sea, dark nights and mists, can give—that peculiar appreciation of sea conditions which is the overwhelming difference between the sea-going and shore-going sailor.

Fisher was virulently accused, by those who knew him little, yet who wrote to the Press as if they were intimately acquainted with his character, of being the High Priest of what they called the "Material School" and of paying no attention to "the man." The above quotation disproves this, and the postscript to a letter to Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, in 1900, deals further with the subject:

P.S.—In an interview with a representative of the *Libre Parole* Admiral d'Hornoy states that the British Navy is undoubtedly the first in the world. Asked whether he believed it was equal to its old reputation, he replied, "I know some people over here do not think so; but to my mind this is a dangerous mistake. There is no doubt whatever that England still has the finest Navy, and that it is superior to the French in regard to the capacity of the officers and men, and also in material; but it is the spirit which animates all English sailors which makes them so much above all others."

(The underlining was Fisher's.)

On the 5th December, 1902, he wrote to Mr. Arnold White:

Private.

The new scheme of entry and training of officers and men of the Navy will be made public on Wednesday night. The Naval Rip Van Winkles (N.B.: that phrase is copyright) have dubbed it as "*a d——d revolutionary scheme.*" So it is! and perhaps they

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are going to vilify me and identify it as my work alone, so as to discredit it! It would be disastrous to the prestige of the scheme if it were in any way otherwise than what it is, which is, the "*unanimous decision of the whole Board of Admiralty*," and therefore I send this line of caution, in case your kindly feelings might entice you to mention my name in association with the scheme, as then the enemy would blaspheme at once! Some of the fossils are going to say the Board of Admiralty has consulted no one, asks no one's advice; the reply is, we ain't fit to be here if we have to ask advice! We are doing what we believe to be right, and we fear no one! Our motto has been "Fiat justicia ruat coelum," or, in vulgar language, "*Do right and d——n the odds.*" (N.B.—This is copyright also.)

The chief innovation in the curriculum was a very thorough engineering course, both in the workshops and in theory. Naturally a course of this nature could not be hurried if it were to be sufficiently comprehensive; the period of tuition therefore was increased to four years instead of only two. This involved double the number of cadets under training than previously had been the case. Since it was not wise to congregate so many boys of widely different ages under a single roof, a second college was started at Osborne, in the Isle of Wight, for the younger cadets. The site chosen was partly that of the old stables of Osborne House, the ground being presented by King Edward. Unfortunately, this college was never thoroughly healthy.

When Fisher had piloted the scheme through the Board of Admiralty, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, so as to be close at hand and thus better able to supervise and expedite the erection and fitting-up of the new buildings, with the result that the college was completed in seven months.

One of the difficulties to be overcome was to

abolish the practice of cramming the boys for an entrance examination, and yet to retain an examination of some sort, in order to select the best of the large number of candidates who presented themselves. This was solved by making all the candidates appear before an Interview Committee. This Committee was composed of an Admiral as President, with usually a Headmaster of some public school, another prominent civilian, and one of the Assistant Secretaries at the Admiralty. The object in view was to ask each of the boys, who were interviewed singly, some questions intended to test his general knowledge, to gain an idea of whether he had kept his eyes open to things around him, and generally to note his alertness and demeanour. Questions such as whether a cow or a horse gets up from lying down with fore or hind legs first; or whether the ears of a cow are in front of or behind her horns, have been quoted as specimens of the torture to which the boys were subjected. But of course these were exceptional; and it was largely the demeanour of the boys, either when answering or failing to answer a question, that counted. One answer deserves to be placed on record:

Admiral. "Well, my boy, can you give us any example of the sagacity of animals that you have noticed?"

The boy hesitated, made no reply at all, and looked uncomfortable and blushed; so, in order to help him, the Admiral said:

"You know, dogs and cats, and animals of that sort, my boy—have you ever known them to do clever things?"

"Oh, *animals*, sir!" said the boy. "I thought you said Admirals!"

A cynic at the Admiralty, in criticizing the scheme, said that the real people to be interviewed were the parents; more could be gathered from them and their

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speech and general behaviour as to how the boy was likely to turn out, than from the boy himself! This view would have been unlikely to find favour in our democratic House of Commons when the scheme was placed before them. An advantage of the Interview system was that every Headmaster was called upon to send a report on any candidate coming from his school. These reports became valuable; for, later on, the worth of any particular Headmaster's recommendations could be gauged by the actual experience gained with his boys at Osborne.

The schedule of the course of studies was arranged on lines laid down by Fisher in consultation with the Director of Naval Education, Mr. J. Ewing, F.R.S., and with Mr. Cyril Ashford,[1] who came from Harrow to be the first Headmaster at Osborne. Here is the skeleton as approved:

History must not only be taught on broad lines; but the particular bearing of naval history on general history has to be dealt with. In fact, the epochs, viewed from the naval standpoints of war and treaties, show an altogether different perspective from those viewed merely from economic standpoints; both have to be studied by the naval officer. Similarly with geography, not only has the naval officer to view the world from the continental side of the question, but even to a greater degree from the oceanic. To him the lands are not so much separated by the oceans and seas, as that these oceans and seas are bounded by lands and continents. Coaling stations assume proportions much beyond their territorial size; the strategic value of narrows, and of certain spots on the ocean marked as part of future battlefields, stand out with preponderating importance in the sailor's mental bird's-eye view of the world, although absent from the minds of those more concerned with social and commercial interests. Both forms of teaching are necessary, so that this subject also has to be approached with almost stereoscopic vision.

[1] Now Sir James Ewing and Sir Cyril Ashford.

Mathematics, both pure and applied, are required in nearly every branch of naval technical knowledge. The standard need not be very advanced, but practical manipulation of formulæ and figures is a necessity. As previously pointed out, a too strictly mathematical mind is apt to be too evenly balanced, and therefore prone to hesitancy, rather than to rapid judgment ; hence a study of pure mathematics beyond the stage necessary to admit of its practical application is to be deprecated. But up to such a stage it is necessary. Ship construction, engineering, hydraulics, ballistics, navigation, and electricity all claim the application of mathematics to enable them to be adequately studied. Engineering must be practical, and also made interesting ; for it is a bold experiment to teach both practical and theoretical engineering to boys of so young an age, especially when it is necessary to devote practically one-third of the weekly time to this subject.

Practical manipulation of engines in steamboats will be a feature of this course of instruction, when hot bearings and other evils are courted for purposes of illustration and for practical adjustment. Workshops, seamanship, laboratory physics, and drill can be looked on almost as a recreation ; and the other subjects will form as varied a programme as was ever taught to one boy. Fifty per cent. of the time will be spent at the former and fifty per cent. at the latter ; hence, no wonder, the eight hours' work a day will be felt to be light when diluted by two half-holidays and fifty per cent. of recreational instruction.

Needless to say, the recreation of the boys is to be well looked after. Cricket, football, and other games will be taught, not merely left to the boys to pick up ; for there are many local elevens and fifteens waiting in different parts of the globe to be beaten, and racquet cups yet to be held. Moreover, every naval officer knows the good produced in a ship by an energetic organizer of games.

For the second period, the boys who have done two years at Osborne move on to the new college at Dartmouth, where their education is carried on on the same general lines for another two years. After this, for the third period, they spend some months in a sea-going cruiser, in every way a man-of-war, but chiefly devoted to initiating the boys into the differences between the theory and the practice of their new profession. This period of time is particularly invaluable to them, since—instead of leaving college as in former times, and joining a ship in full commission, green to the ways and routine of sea-life, where want of experience

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and elementary knowledge about daily detail was apt to lead to ridicule, and was therefore most discouraging to youngsters—they will make their first plunge under the eyes of sympathetic officers, who teach and explain ; so that, finally, when they enter on the last stage of tuition, and step on board the ship where first they become responsible and useful officers, they do so with confidence in their ability to do the work allotted to them.

The final examination will take place before leaving the cruiser, and on this the seniority of the cadets (or midshipmen, as they now become) will depend. An award of time according to the results of his examination will be granted to each midshipman, but this will not take effect until he becomes an acting Sub-Lieutenant.

It is difficult to conceive a scheme more carefully thought out from the point of view of the cadet and his practical education to be an officer worthy of the traditions of the Royal Navy.

The new scheme of education embraced not only the Executive and Engineer officers, but also the Marine officers. The Corps of Royal Marines dates back to 1664 ; but, at first, and for many years after, it was a force that was only raised for war, and was disbanded on the conclusion of peace ; it was not until 1775 that the modern Marine Force was established. Its chief function was to keep mutiny in check ; the Marines were " sworn " men, whereas the seamen swore no allegiance to anyone. To this day the custom is maintained of having the rifles and other arms of the seamen kept near the officers' quarters, and of placing the living-quarters of the Marines between the officers and the remainder of the ship's company.

The Marines were a particularly fine corps, but the officers have always looked on themselves more as soldiers than sailors. There has ever been more glamour attaching to the Army than the Navy. The

officers of the Army, from the nature of their employment, spent most of their time in England, and therefore have been able to indulge in country and social pursuits, whereas the naval officer has always been bundled off to sea at an early age, and has only spent such time in his native country as the parsimony of their Lordships at the Admiralty may have eked out. Moreover, a boy in the Navy led a life, especially in the old days, of great discomfort, and throughout his career had to battle with malaria and yellow fever as well as gales of wind and the enemy. As a result, eldest sons chose the Army as a profession, and the younger members had to put up with the Navy. Eldest sons usually had money and often succeeded to the family estates, whereas the cadet of the family had to scrape along often on a pittance. Naturally, therefore, Army officers, at all events before these days of mechanization, were accorded socially a greater prestige than the struggling naval officer. It is not to be wondered at that the Marine officer hankered after the fleshpots of the Army, and to be considered a military rather than a naval officer.

Now, it must be allowed, and it was admitted even by Marine officers themselves, that when on board ship they had very little to do. Their relations and work with their men were precisely the same as those of the Lieutenants with the seamen, except that the Lieutenant had his special duties, or his watch-keeping, to do in addition. Here obviously was talent wasted.

Fisher countenanced no waste of brain-power on board ship. He therefore framed his new scheme so as to include the Marine officer. He was in future to be entered as a naval cadet and trained in the duties of a sea-officer, and to branch off at about twenty-

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one years of age to become permanently a Marine officer.

The scheme had great advantages, for not only did it give a further reserve of executive officers, but it also gave the Marine officer a greater opportunity to take a more intelligent interest in the general work of the ship, and of the Fleet, than had previously been possible. In joint naval and military operations the Marine would become a far more valuable officer, owing to his intimate knowledge of sea conditions.

Fisher never introduced any change he considered advisable without first having it fully considered, in all its bearings, by a competent Committee. It has been said that his Committees were packed, and were merely convened to endorse his own opinions. But such a charge will not bear investigation, for Fisher could not afford to risk any failures in his new schemes. The principles of all his reforms were fully considered by competent and impartial Committees, who reported after ample evidence had been taken ; but when once a principle had been approved, the further Committee appointed to work out the details was deliberately constituted to include only persons in agreement with the scheme. Obviously, the opponents of any change are not the proper people to bring it into operation.

A strong Committee sat to consider the amalgamation scheme that was proposed for combining the entry of future Marine officers, and they drew up a definite scheme which was adopted. But the Marine officers themselves would not accept it. Great pressure was brought to bear from external sources, and in the end the scheme had to be partially abandoned.

To a certain extent the same happened with the Engineer officers. In 1906 Fisher considered that the

time was ripe, and that it would be advantageous to confer executive titles and uniforms on the Engineer officers. This was not the opinion of many of the officers who, so far, had worked in close accord with him. They were strongly of opinion that, not only was it a step that would increase the opposition to the new scheme of training on the part of the executive officers, but it would also create difficulties in getting the cadets to volunteer for engineering duties. Their view was, that if the old Engineer officers were kept quite distinct, and the new officers retained their executive titles and uniforms when they took over engineering duties, the older prejudices would die out and volunteers would come forward readily. Fisher was not convinced, and he appointed a Committee to consider the matter, and deliberately nominated as members various officers who had expressed disagreement. In due course the Committee reported, the majority being in favour of the proposals. Some of the executive officers presented a minority report, which concluded with these words :

> As officers in touch with the sea-going Fleet, we would remind their Lordships that the great changes that have taken place in the Navy during the last two years have created a feeling of great unrest and uncertainty which only loyalty has in a measure soothed. It is very undesirable therefore to introduce, at the present moment, any further important changes which are not absolutely necessary. We submit that no necessity for these proposed changes has been shown to exist. On the other hand, their introduction would unquestionably produce a feeling of injustice and unfair treatment on the part of a large majority of the officers, and would tend to revive class animosities which have gradually been dying out. Such a condition of things would be most unsettling and prejudicial to the Service. No more inopportune time than the present could have been chosen to inflict the Service in this manner, and we confidently anticipate that so ruinous a policy will not be pursued.

On receiving this report Fisher was angry. The plain speaking of the minority report nullified the concurrence of the majority of the Committee, and he was unable to proceed further with the scheme. Each of the members signing the minority report received a letter expressing their Lordships' disapproval at the language in which their report had been couched ; but there the matter ended for the time. Later on, when he returned to the Admiralty during the war, he saw his opportunity and gave the old-system Engineer officers the executive rank and uniform. He made the change for two reasons: First, to redeem a promise he had made to this effect ; and, secondly, because he was deeply impressed by the efficiency of the engine-room departments since the outbreak of war, and considered this " New Year's gift " an appropriate reward. The analogy of the amalgamation of the old navigating and executive Branches was always in his mind. He would never agree that the best way of encouraging young officers of the new system to take up engineering was to retain the existing distinctions between the old-class engineers and the executive line. His obstinacy went far towards causing the scheme to be modified after his death in a way he would have greatly lamented.

A reform of such magnitude as this new Education Scheme required the vision and driving force of a Fisher to carry it through. If it had been possible for him to have held the reins until the scheme was completely established, all difficulties would have been surmounted.

We find Fisher, after the war, writing indignantly to a friend that certain officers afloat were trying to kill the new scheme by sneering at any boys who elected

to take up engineering, calling them " greasers " and otherwise making their lives a burden to them. He adds characteristically: " If I were back at the Admiralty, three Post-Captains would be on half-pay to-morrow." This, however, was not to be.

One giant in every fifty years seems to be the maximum in our Navy. So long as strong men ruled at the Admiralty, the scheme was kept intact. But after the war and down to 1927, there were not First Lords or First Sea Lords who could hold high the flaming cross of reform as it had been held by Lord Selborne, Mr. McKenna, and Fisher, and subtle erosion was allowed to destroy important portions of Fisher's magnificent scheme.

Three-quarters of the opposition met with by Fisher in introducing his reforms was due to a fear on the part of " Society," and naval officers, that their sons might, under the new scheme of education, be forced to become engineers. When the time came for separation of the common-entry officers into executive and Engineers, at about the age of twenty-five, if there were not sufficient volunteers for the Engineering Branch, the Admiralty would have, without doubt, to select officers to fill the vacancies. This was the point which was so disliked. Class prejudice existed, and exists now. The Engineering Branch was looked on as an inferior calling, and one that the majority of the aristocrats did not wish their sons to enter. The agitators did not hesitate to add fuel to this discontent by picturing engineering as a dirty, oily occupation, and stigmatizing all aspirants to the branch as " greasers." This was the real cause of the opposition to Fisher's schemes, of Lord Charles Beresford's considerable popularity (for he was hailed as the possible

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saviour of the executive line of the Navy as an aristocratic Service), and the rancorous campaign against Fisher personally.

In October 1903 Fisher attended the Royal Academy banquet and made a speech which created a stir at the time. The bluff directness of his style was entirely different from that of the usual after-dinner speaker, as was also his action in sweeping a decanter into the lap of the Secretary of State for War in order to emphasize a statement. Here is the verbatim report as it appeared next day in the morning papers :

The Navy always appreciates readily the kind words in which this toast is proposed and also the kind manner in which it is always received. I beg to thank you especially, Mr. President, for your kind reference to Captain Percy Scott, which is so well deserved. He was indeed a handy man. (Cheers.) Personally I have not the same pleasurable feelings on this occasion as I enjoyed last year when I had no speech to make. I remember quite well remarking to my neighbour, " How good the whitebait is, how excellent the champagne, and how jolly not to have to make a speech ! " He glared at me and said, " I have got to make a speech, and the whitebait to me is *bête noire*, and the champagne is real pain." (Laughter.) He was so ready with this answer that I thought to myself, " You'll get through it all right," and, sure enough, he did, for he spoke thirty minutes by the clock without a check. (Laughter.) I'm going to give you three minutes. (Cries of " No.") Yes.

I always think on these occasions of the first time I went to sea on board my first ship, an old sailing two-decker, and I saw inscribed in great big gold letters the one word " Silence." (Laughter.) Underneath was another good motto : " Deeds, not words." (Cheers.) I have put that into every ship I have commanded since. (Cheers.) This leads me to another motto which is better still, and brings me to the point of what I have to say in reply to the toast that has been proposed. When I was Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean I went to inspect a small destroyer, only 260 tons, but with such pride and swagger that she might have been 16,000 tons. (Laughter.) The young Lieutenant in

command took me round; she was in beautiful order, and I came aft to the wheel and saw there the inscription, "Ut veniant omnes." "Hullo," I said, "what the deuce is that?" (Laughter.) Saluting me, he said, "Let 'em all come, sir." (Great laughter and cheers.) Well, that was not boasting; that was the sense of conscious efficiency—(cheers)—the sense that permeates the whole Fleet (cheers)—and I used to think at the Admiralty it would be irresistible provided the Admiral is up to the mark.

The Lord Chief Justice, sitting near me now, has kindly promised to pull me down if I say too much. (Laughter.) But I wish to make this remark to you, and it is a good thing for everybody to know it. There has been a great change in Navy matters since the old time. In regard to naval warfare, history is a record of exploded ideas. (Laughter and cheers.) In the old days they were sailors' battles. Now they are Admirals' battles. I should like to recall to you the greatest battle at sea ever fought. What was the central episode of that? Nelson received his death-wound, and what was he doing? Walking up and down the quarter-deck arm in arm with his Captain. It is drastically described to us by an onlooker. His secretary is shot down. Nelson turns round and says, "Poor Scott! Take him down to the cockpit," and then he goes on again walking up and down, having a yarn with his Captain. What does that mean? It means that in the old days the Admiral took his Fleet into action, each ship got alongside the enemy, and, as Nelson finely said, "they got into their proper place"—(cheers)—and then the Admiral had not much more to do. The ships were nearly touching one another, the Bo'sun went with some rope and lashed them together so as to make them quite comfortable—(laughter)—and the sailors loaded and fired away until it was time to board. But what is the case now? It is conceivable that within twenty minutes of sighting the enemy on the horizon the action will have begun, and on the disposition of his Fleet by the Admiral—on his tactics—the battle will depend. For all the gunnery in the world is no good if the guns are masked by our own ships or cannot bear on the enemy! In that way I wish to tell you how much now depends on the Admirals and on their education. Therefore, joined with the spirit, of which the remark of the young Lieutenant I mentioned to you is an indication, permeating the whole Service, we require a fearless, vigorous, and progressive administration, open to any reform—(loud cheers)—and never

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resting on its oars—for to stop is to go back—and forecasting every eventuality.

I will just take two instances at hazard. Look at the submarine boat and wireless telegraphy. When they are perfected, we do not know what a revolution will come about. In their inception they were the weapons of the weak. Now they loom large as the weapons of the strong. Will any Fleet be able to live in narrow waters? Is there the slightest fear of invasion with them even for the most extreme pessimist? I might mention other subjects; but the great fact which I come to is that we are realizing, the Navy and the Admiralty are realizing, that on the British Navy rests the British Empire. (Loud cheers.) Nothing else is of any use without it, not even the Army. (Here the gallant Admiral, amid laughter, turned to Mr. Brodrick, the Secretary for War, who sat near him.) We are different from continental nations, for no soldier of ours can go anywhere unless a sailor carries him on his back. (Laughter.) I am not disparaging the Army! I am looking forward to them coming to sea with us again as they did in the old days. Why, Nelson had three regiments of infantry with him at the battle of Cape St. Vincent, and the Sergeant of the 69th Regiment led the boarders, and, Nelson having one arm only, it was the Sergeant who helped him up. (Cheers.) The Secretary for War particularly asked me to allude to the Army, or else I would not have done it. (Loud laughter.) In conclusion, I assure you that the Navy and the Admiralty recognize their responsibility. I think I may say that we now have a Board of Admiralty that is united, progressive, and determined—(cheers)—and you may sleep quietly in your beds. (Loud cheers.)

In the Coronation Honours List Fisher was created a G.C.B.

On 31st August, 1903, only about sixteen months after going to the Admiralty, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth. The reason assigned was that it would enable him to supervise the erection of the new college at Osborne, which, as we have seen, had been rendered necessary owing to the lengthened course of studies for the naval cadets under the new scheme of education.

The question arose as to how long it would take to build the college. The Admiralty contractor said three years. " I want it built in seven months," said Fisher, " so that King Edward can open it in August." The answer given was : " Impossible." But, as luck would have it, a friend at that time visited him, bringing with him an American, who had gone over the *Renown* when she was at Quebec and had heard Fisher holding forth on board of her, and who was very anxious to renew the acquaintanceship. It turned out that he was a lightning builder who had come over to build an hotel. Fisher was delighted, and after a short explanation of what was wanted the American promised to build the college and have it ready by August. The college was duly opened by King Edward on 4th August.

While Commander-in-Chief he, in addition to his other work, was made a member of a Committee appointed to reorganize the War Office. It was a peculiar appointment for a naval officer, and at the time was rather resented by the Army generally, although afterwards they were able to appreciate the wisdom of the selection.

In his *Memories* he gives the following account of the genesis of what was known officially as the " Esher Committee on War Office Reform " :

> Somebody felt in 1903 that the War Office was wrong, and so a Committee was set up with Lord Esher as President, Sir George Clarke and myself as the other two members ; and that very able and not sufficiently recognized man, now General Sir C. Ellison, was Secretary. How I got there is still a mystery, but it was a great enjoyment, as Generals came to stay with me at Admiralty House, Portsmouth (I was Port Admiral). I always explained to them I was Lord Esher's facile dupe and Sir George Clarke's servile copyist, and thereby avoided odium

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personally (I was getting all the odium I wanted from the Admirals).

This, of course, is his jocular way of glossing over the fact that he was specially chosen to be a member of the Committee by King Edward, who had a firm belief in his administrative capacity. The appointment of the Committee arose, indirectly, from the minority report of the Commission appointed to inquire into the conduct of the South African War. When a reprint of that report was made (after Mr. Arnold Forster had succeeded Mr. Brodrick as Secretary of State for War), Lord Esher, who was largely responsible for the minority report, pressed the King not to let the opportunity slip, but to have a Committee appointed to go thoroughly into the question of War Office reform. Mr. Balfour agreed, and Lord Esher was selected as President. The King, having a high opinion of Fisher as an organizer, put him down as a member. Several other names were passed in review, among which were those of Sir Henry Brackenbury, Sir John French, and Lord Selborne. It was recognized that the last would make an excellent chairman; but, since he was a civilian, and it was necessary to have one military member, his inclusion meant increasing the number of members on the Committee to four, whereas it was most desirable to keep to three only. Lord Grenfell was asked, but refused. At this the King was somewhat annoyed; but Lord Grenfell explained that he could not, as a matter of discipline, while still on the active list, sit on a Committee which would undoubtedly shelve some officers who were his seniors in the Army. The King appreciated this point of view; and, eventually, Sir George Clarke was appointed.

Lord Esher had, with great wisdom and foresight,

THE "DAUNTLESS THREE"
Sir John Fisher, Lord Esher, Sir George Clarke

insisted that all the proposals of the Committee that met with the Prime Minister's approval should be instantly acted on, and had obtained from him a promise that this should be done. Heretofore the War Office had always adopted the methods of the Turk in the face of reform; in other words, all proposals had been commented on, controversial points raised, and objections pointed out; with the result that any reform was so delayed and whittled down by inter-departmental correspondence that, in the end, it met with its death from old age and controversy. The new Committee would have none of this; as each section of the report was issued, its main provisions were approved, and came at once into force.

The Committee lost no time in getting to work. Sir George Clarke had to be recalled from Australia; but in the meanwhile a good deal of work was done. It was on the 7th November that Fisher was appointed. He at once wrote to Lord Esher:

> The military system is rotten to the very core! You want to begin *ab ovo!* The best of the Generals are even worse than the subalterns, because they are more hardened sinners! I fear I shocked Ellison, but he is simply first class, and I most heartily congratulate you on your selection. . . . I really begin to feel I never ought to have joined it, as I have some very big jobs on now which require incessant personal attention; and this must be my excuse for not coming up to see Girouard this week. I have the new Civil Lord staying with me, and I have got to prevent him joining with a lot of asses at the Admiralty who want to throw half a million of money in the gutter.

Some of the other letters he wrote to Lord Esher are interesting, since they show the strong views he held on military subjects. On the 19th November he wrote:

> We cannot reform the Army administration until it is laid down

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what it is the administration is going to administer! For instance, the citizen Army for self-defence! Are we going to have it? If so, then you will certainly want a member of the Board or Council to superintend it! Again I say, the *regular Army* (as distinguished from the *Home Army* and the *Indian Army*) should be regarded as a projectile to be fired by the Navy. The Navy embarks it and lands it where it can do most mischief! Thus the Germans are ready to land a large military force on the Cotentin Peninsula [1] in case of war with France, and my German military colleague at The Hague Conference told me that this comparatively small military force would have the effect of demobilizing half a million of men who would thus be taken away from the German frontier. They never know where the devil the brutes are going to land; consequently, instead of our military manœuvres being on Salisbury Plain and its vicinity, ineffectually apeing the vast Continental armies, we should be employing ourselves in joint naval and military manœuvres embarking 50,000 men at Portsmouth and landing them at Milford Haven or Bantry Bay. This would make the foreigners sit up. Fancy, in the Mediterranean Fleet we disembarked 12,000 men with guns in nineteen minutes. What do you think of that? And we should hurry up the soldiers. No doubt there would be good-natured chaff! Once we embarked 7,000 soldiers at Malta, and took them round and landed them elsewhere for practice, and I remember having a complaint that the bluejackets said, "Come on, you bloody Lobsters, wake up!" However, all the above *en passant*.

This letter, *inter alia*, shows Fisher's clear conception of the proper use of our Army in a Continental war, about which more anon. The following extract is from a letter of the 5th January, 1904:

P.S.—*Private*.

I yesterday sent all my plans to French for embarking the whole of his first Army on Monday, June 27th (full moon), at Portsmouth, and he coming here with his Chief Staff Officer, Sir Frederick Stopford, next week, and we land them like Hoche's Army in Bantry Bay.

[1] The horn on the north coast of France that is near the Channel Islands.

To which Fisher appends the note:
"The War Office stopped this."

It is quite conceivable that had this manœuvre been carried out, and similar ones undertaken annually and the Army educated into being a striking force *in excelsis*, and eventually landed in Belgium on the flank of the German Army, the whole course of the Great War might have been altered.

25th November, 1903.

I send you two books—a more portly volume I hesitate to send. Also, I fear without some verbal explanation you may not see the application to military matters of these purely naval notes, but they do apply in the spirit if not in the letter! For instance, I had an overwhelming confidence that every officer and man in the Mediterranean Fleet had also an overwhelming confidence that we thoroughly knew all we had to do in case of war in every conceivable eventuality! Well! that is the confidence we also want in the Army! Have you got it?

4th December, 1903.

. . . You are right about the submarines. We strain at the gnat of perfection and swallow the camel of unreadiness, and that permeates every branch of naval and military administration, forgetting the homely proverb that "half a loaf is better than no bread!" But, please God! "the Dauntless Three" [Sir George Clarke, Lord Esher, and Sir John Fisher] (as I see we are now called) will change all that! "We'll stagger humanity," as old Kruger said.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman christened the three: Damnable, Domineering, and Dictatorial.

17th December, 1903.

Another military Nicodemus came to see me yesterday. I had never met him before! He occupies a high official position. He highly approved of you and me. But he had never heard of the third member of the Committee. He said [with reference to Colonel Sir George Clarke,] What a pity they did not put a soldier on the Committee! (How these Christians hate one another!) But the point of his remarks was the present system of Army

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promotions, which he said was as iniquitous and baleful in its influence as could be possibly conceived; and then he illustrated by cases of certain officers made Generals. My only object in writing this to you is [because] Selborne has spoken of the Admiralty method; where the First Lord has the Naval Members of the Board in consultation, but he and his private secretary (who is always a naval officer of note) have the real responsibility.

21st December, 1903.

I've been bombarded by Stead. I tried to boom him off, but the scoundrel said if I didn't see him, he would have to invent! I pointed out to him my *métier* was that of the mole! Trace me by upheavals! When you see the Admirals rise, it's that d——d fellow Jack Fisher taking the rise out of them! So I implored Stead to keep me out of the "Magazine Rifle" (this was my name for the *Review of Reviews*), or he will interfere with my professional career of crime. So please use your influence with him in the same direction. You and Clarke are the two legitimate members of the Committee to be trotted out, as you are both so well known. No sailor is ever known. The King was awfully good about this. He said, "Sailors went all round the world, but never went in it!" Stead is a very keen observer, as you know. He said our Committee could do anything, and that neither the Press, nor Parliament, nor the Public could tolerate any military opposition to us because the whole military hierarchy was utterly discredited from top to bottom; but he doubted *The Times*. *I don't.*

On the 11th January a report was forwarded to the Prime Minister, of which the following are the main proposals:

The evidence taken by the Royal Commission proves that the Cabinet had in 1899 no adequate means of obtaining reasoned opinions on which to base a war policy. We are strongly impressed by the gravity of the danger thus incurred, which would, in circumstances easily imagined, lead to national disaster.

At the outset of our inquiry, therefore, we are driven to the conclusion that no measure of War Office reform will avail unless it is associated with provision for obtaining and collating, for the use of the Cabinet, all the information and the expert advice required for the shaping of national policy in war and for determining the necessary preparations in peace. Such information

and advice must necessarily embrace not only the sphere of the War Office, but those of the Admiralty and of the other offices of State.

The Defence Committee of the Cabinet, as now constituted, is intended to fulfil this imperative requirement; but we are convinced that further development is essential. A Committee which contains no permanent nucleus, and which is composed of political and professional members, each preoccupied with administrative duties widely differing, cannot, in our opinion, deal adequately with the complex questions of Imperial defence.

Our national problems of defence are far more difficult and complex than those of any other Power. They require exhaustive study over a much wider field. The Great General Staff at Berlin is the machine by which the Emperor, who is charged with maintaining the efficiency of the Army, and would be its Commander-in-Chief in war, directs and controls the military policy of the German nation. Differences of conditions forbid the reproduction of the German system in this country, where the responsibility for efficiency and sufficiency of preparations for war rests upon Parliament and, in a special sense, upon the Prime Minister. We hold that it is essential to provide the latter with adequate means of discharging his heavy obligations to the Empire.

The general recommendations of the Committee, therefore, were that:

The permanent nucleus of the Defence Committee should consist of:

(1) A Permanent Secretary, who should be appointed for five years, renewable at pleasure.

(2) Under this official, two naval officers selected by the Admiralty, two military officers chosen by the War Office, and two Indian officers nominated by the Viceroy, with, if possible, one or more representatives of the Colonies. These officers should not be of high rank, and the duration of their appointment should be limited to two years.

The duties of the permanent nucleus of the Defence Committee would be:

A. To consider all questions of Imperial Defence from the point of view of the Navy, the Military Force, India, and the Colonies.

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B. To obtain and collate information from the Admiralty, War Office, India Office, Colonial Office, and other Departments of State.

C. Prepare any documents required by the Prime Minister and the Defence Committee, anticipating their needs if possible.

D. To furnish such advice as the Committee may ask for in regard to Defence questions involving more than one Department of State.

E. To keep adequate records for the use of the Cabinet of the day and of its successors.

A second report was forwarded on the same day dealing with the reorganization of the War Office itself. The Committee during its deliberations did not take formal evidence, since it was considered undesirable to add to the enormous volume of evidence already available; but counsel was taken with all the high officials, military and civil, whose views and experience were likely to throw light upon the investigations. Their views, however, were not recorded, so they were able to express their opinions with complete freedom.

The Committee had been directed by their terms of reference to take the Admiralty system of higher administration as the basis of action, since it was considered that, though there might be imperfections in the workings of that system, it was absolutely sound in principle. It conformed closely to the arrangements under which the largest private industries were conducted, and it had for several centuries retained the confidence of the Navy and the nation.

As regards the War Office reconstruction, the Report stated:

No public department has been so frequently examined or so scathingly criticized by Commissions and Committees as the War Office.

When in 1890 the Hartington Commission urged drastic measures of reorganization, nothing was done.

The experience of the South African campaign has clearly shown that the system of administration prevailing was not adapted to the requirements of war ; and an examination of the methods and regulations of the War Office strengthens the impression that the real object for which this Department of State exists—the preparation of the military forces of the Crown for war—has not been attained.

The relations of the Secretary of State to the Military Heads of the War Office are not such as to enable him to discharge his duties to the best advantage. The centralization of a vast number of incongruous functions in the Commander-in-Chief results in the neglect of work of primary importance.

At the same time the duties and responsibilities of the Military Heads are ill-defined, and their relations to each other and the Secretary of State are not such as effective administration demands.

We consider that, as a first step in the reconstruction of the War Office, the position of the Secretary of State should be placed on precisely the same footing as that of the First Lord of the Admiralty, and that all submissions to the Crown in regard to military questions should be made by him alone.

The next step is the constitution of a Board, or, as we prefer to call it, an "Army Council," following the general principles which obtain at the Admiralty.

The Council should consist of seven members—four military and three civil—with the Permanent Under-Secretary as Secretary. Or, summarizing, the grouping would be :

A. Minister responsible to the Crown and to Parliament.
B. Operations of War.
C. Personnel.
D. Supply.
E. Armament.
F. Civil business.
G. Finance.

New measures demand new men, and we therefore attach special importance to the immediate appointment of Military Members who have not hitherto been closely connected with existing methods, and are therefore not likely to be embarrassed by the traditions of a system which is to be radically changed. Fresh minds will thus be brought to bear upon the work of the Council, and the

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new principles of administration will be smoothly inaugurated. Failing this action, which could not be regarded as conveying any possible reflection upon the distinguished Generals now holding high offices, we see no hope that the reconstitution of the War Office will be a reality.

It was recognized both by the Hartington Commission and by the Members of the War Commission who signed the minority report, that the high office of Commander-in-Chief, as hitherto defined, is inconsistent with the principle of administration of the Army by the Secretary of State and a Board or Council.

We therefore consider that it is imperative to abolish the office of Commander-in-Chief, which was only revived late in 1887, and we urge the divorce of administration from executive command and the decentralization of the latter.

If the conditions which obtained before the South African War had been brought to the knowledge of the Secretary of State and the Cabinet, on the high authority of an experienced General Officer, known to be independent of the administrative work of the War Office, and specially charged with the duty of reporting on actual facts, many evils could have been averted.

We shall hereafter recommend the appointment of an Inspector-General, whose sole function would be to report upon policy, and who should therefore be located outside the War Office. He should be appointed by the Crown on the recommendation of the Secretary of State, and the appointment should be for five years.

In pursuance of the principle of decentralization, the Committee recommended the division of the country into seven administrative districts. England was to be divided into five territorial commands, which embraced approximately equal populations; Scotland and Ireland completed the seven. These were to be commanded by Major-Generals, each of whom would have a Staff, and a civil branch supplied by the War Office to keep the accounts of the district. These General Officers were to decide all questions on their own responsibility. The result would be to relieve the War Office, and especially the Adjutant-General's

Office, which was described by the Dawkins Committee as "hopelessly disorganized by a vast amount of business which they cannot now effectively transact."

On the 17th January Fisher wrote to Lord Esher:

I am most anxious to avoid any semblance of hasty action or ill-considered steps hereafter, and it is always well to be quite clear on vital points. I know we are all three agreed that "new measures require new men," and I think we could not emphasize more strongly than we have done in our report the necessity of a complete breach with the past. . . .

For the reasons I have given you at length in another letter, I am convinced that French should be First Military Member, and under him there should be *three Directors* (not hieroglyphics, such as A.Q.U.M.C.1, D.A.G.M.G., A.Q.U.M.G.2, etc., etc.). Smith-Dorrien and Plumer should be the Second and Third Military Members, and perhaps some young distinguished Indian Officer Fourth Military Lord. . . .

Haig, Inspector-General of Cavalry in India, should be brought home as the principal *Director* under *Second Military Lord*. . . . We don't want dull dogs for this new scheme, we must have youth and enthusiasm, because, as you and Clarke know far better than I do, the whole military system is rotten from top to bottom (*more rotten at the top than the bottom*). And it is only by the agency of young and enthusiastic believers in the immense revolutions that must be carried out that our scheme can bear fruit. The first thing of all is that everyone of the "old gang" must be cleared out "lock, stock, and gunbarrel, bob and sinker." The next is that every one of the new men must be *successful* men, and must be young, and enthusiastic and cordial supporters of the new policy. Over every fellow's door at the War Office under the new régime has got to be written in large letters, "No looking back. Remember Lot's Wife."

Enclosure to above letter.

Sacred.

First Military Member: Sir John French, because he never failed in South Africa (the grave of military reputations). He is *young and energetic*, has commanded the First Army Corps so far with conspicuous success, and has the splendid gift of choosing the right

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men to work with him (*vide* his staff in South Africa, the best staff out there).

"*Plump for French and efficiency.*" Every vote given against French is a vote given to . . .

Second Military Member: Smith-Dorrien has been with great success in every campaign for the last twenty years and has been *Adjutant-General* in India (a much bigger billet than Adjutant-General in London). He is *young and energetic*, and is an extremely conciliatory and accomplished gentleman, and would work the personnel of the Army (which would be his chief function) far better than some "safe" old man, because he is in touch with the young generation. "Vote for Smith-Dorrien and Progress. Every vote given against Smith-Dorrien is a vote for . . ."

Third Military Member: *General Plumer.* The only man besides French that never failed in *anything he undertook in Africa.* They say he has "the luck of the Devil," but the fact is that the "luck of the Devil" is wholly attributable to a minute attention to everything that will ensure the success of his satanic majesty's designs, and he leaves nothing to chance. Such is Plumer. He is also young, energetic, and enthusiastic. "Vote for Plumer and a full belly. Every vote given against Plumer is given for paper boots and no ammunition."

Fourth Military Member: General F. G. Slade, now Inspector-General of Garrison Artillery. Has served in six campaigns and has always come out top, has been in the Horse, Field, and Garrison Artillery and commanded at Gibraltar. He is *young, energetic, enthusiastic*, and will blow the trumpet of the Board (*as well as his own*). "Vote for Slade and hitting the target. Every vote given against Slade will be a vote given in favour of some d——d old woman."

Inspector-General of the Forces: Duke of Connaught. A thorough gentleman and a good soldier in all branches.

"God save the King."

Every vote given against this scheme is a vote given in favour of Mr. Labouchere being Adjutant-General.

In forwarding their final report, the Committee wrote in a letter to the Prime Minister:

There appears to be some misconception of the lines on which we have proceeded.

Then followed a brief résumé of the previous reports, and the letter continues :

We have been concerned to notice in some quarters a forgetfulness of the circumstances under which your Committee was appointed.

The report of the War Commission revealed a condition of affairs which outraged public feeling throughout the Empire. A remedy was suggested in the minority report of the Commission, and to your Committee was entrusted the specific duty of advising upon the means of applying the remedy in question.

This duty we have endeavoured to fulfil in such a manner as to uproot a system which had been scathingly condemned by the Hartington Commission as long ago as 1890, and which is directly responsible for the want of preparation for war and the subsequent breakdown in the winter of 1899, exposed in the evidence before the South African War Commission. We unhesitatingly assert that if the recommendations of the majority of the Hartington Commission had not been ignored, the country would have been saved the loss of thousands of lives and of many millions of pounds, subsequently sacrificed in the South African War.

In this final report the Committee dealt in detail with the organization of the whole of the departments of the War Office ; this had been arranged in conjunction with the new heads, who had been appointed. In conclusion they remarked :

It has been our object to avoid details as far as possible, but to erect a strong well-knit fabric which can be elaborated by others. So long as the details, which we maintain to be vital, are consistently upheld, we have full confidence in the result of our labours.

We look to the Army Council, which His Majesty's Government has now established, to supply the motive power and the direction necessary to create efficiency throughout the Army, and to ensure smooth and orderly progress. Upon the General Officers commanding in Chief will rest the training of the troops, which will now become almost their sole duty. To the Major-Generals commanding Districts we have assigned important administrative functions, upon the discharge of which in peace and in war the welfare of the Army will depend. The Inspector-General of the Forces is not the superior of the General Officers upon whose commands he will

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report, but they will learn to look to him for assistance in making their forces efficient in the widest sense of the term.

It has been said of Napoleon that, by the overwhelming force of his personality he destroyed the initiative and the responsibility of his Generals, discovering too late the irreparable loss which was due to his methods. The system under which the British Army has been trained hitherto has produced the same result; but the genius of a Napoleon has been absent. We have, therefore, endeavoured to devise a system, so completely decentralized, that the sense of responsibility must in time be brought home to individuals, and that incompetence must be revealed. There can be no doubt that the lack of initiative, which can be traced directly to the defects of military administration, was a source of weakness to our arms in South Africa.

If our proposals are accepted and loyally carried out, there will in time be a total change in this respect. The Members of the Army Council will not be able to shelter themselves behind the Commander-in-Chief, or to impute to the Secretary of State the responsibility for decisions of which they disapprove. They will be provided with Directors having clearly defined duties, who will relieve them of details and enable them to give attention to policy. They must delegate large powers to their Directors, remembering that devolution, accompanied by wise supervision, is the test of a good administrator.

The acceptance of the principles which we strongly advocate must, in our opinion, steadily tend to the creation of a body of officers trained to accept individual responsibility and to act, when necessary, without referring everything to superior authority. At the same time we believe that we have so drawn the line between the duties of the various groups as to secure the great advantage of a scientific division of labour, which is essential in all civil business, and which becomes more and more necessary as the work of maintaining an efficient Army increases in difficulty and in complexity.

The report of the Committee was approved by the King on the 26th February, and the recommendations not already acted on were then dealt with. The establishment of the new Commands prevented the decentralization portion of the report being brought into effect till January 1905.

What must strike anyone on reading even this brief summary of the findings of the Committee is the way in which common sense was blended with extreme energy of action and diction, and the rapidity with which the labours of the Committee were carried out and their report furnished.

Fisher laments in his *Memories* that the Prime Minister would not go the *totus porcus* (whole hog), as he calls it, but the majority of the submissions were acted on, and the War Office was dragged from its mire of over-centralization and confusion, and placed on a sound administrative basis.

The King was greatly pleased with the reports, and was anxious to confer some signal mark of his favour on the Committee; but the Prime Minister pointed out that Fisher had become First Sea Lord (not that that was in any way due to his work on the Committee), and that Sir George Clarke had been appointed Secretary of the Defence Committee with a salary of £2,000 a year, and that Lord Esher, it was true, had had nothing; so the matter dropped.

It was recognized at the time by many that one danger that might result from the reconstitution of the Defence Committee and the formation of a Permanent Secretariat was that this staff might be tempted to interfere with the administrative functions of the Admiralty or War Office. This did occur shortly afterwards, as we shall see, and it nearly wrecked the Secretariat scheme.[1] However, it survived that crisis and afterwards did good service.

During his tenure of the Portsmouth Command Fisher did much towards bringing the modern developments in the Navy to the notice of prominent public

[1] See Volume II, page 97.

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men. He frequently invited persons of influence in Parliament or the country to stay at Admiralty House, and showed them over the submarine boats, Osborne College, and the latest novelties at the Gunnery School at Whale Island. These statesmen at all events left with some knowledge about the Navy and its work in war.

He was an ardent supporter of the submarine boats. At that time they were in their infancy. Five Holland boats had been completed, and one A boat. Opinion was divided in the Navy and at Headquarters as regards their possibilities. Fisher had no doubt. With prophetic vision he looked ahead past temporary disabilities, and saw their potential value in the future. He was particularly impressed with the fact that "the submarine was no answer to the submarine." Here was a new invention, to combat which some new method, some new appliance, perhaps some new vessel, would have to be invented. The blindness of a submarine prevented it acting against an enemy submarine, except under very peculiar circumstances.

Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson was not a believer in submarines, and disliked them cordially. He had suggested to the Admiralty that they should publicly declare that, in war-time, the crews of all submarines captured would be treated as pirates and hanged. This suggestion, however, did not meet with favour. Sir Arthur then, being in command of the Channel Fleet, asked that he should be allowed to carry out trials to prove the value or otherwise of the boats. This was approved, and the whole strength of that powerful Fleet was brought against six very feeble boats. Fisher was then a tower of strength; since, being senior to Sir Arthur, he could, and did, ensure

that they received reasonably fair treatment. At the end of a week's manœuvres, two of Sir Arthur's ships were considered to have been sunk, and a third narrowly avoided the same fate. One submarine, the A.1, was run into and sunk by a merchant vessel. These manœuvres caused the Admiralty to take submarines seriously. For ever afterwards Fisher was a warm advocate of our building freely, and improving this type of vessel.

In February 1904 King Edward honoured Sir John and Lady Fisher by staying at Admiralty House. He visited the submarine boat A1, the college at Osborne, the convalescent home at Osborne, and H.M.S. *Victory*. At the time of the visit the latter ship was in dock being repaired, having suffered from a collision while at her moorings in the harbour. Lady Fisher had interested herself in having the cockpit, where Nelson had died, restored to its pristine condition. The bulkheads that had been put up of recent years were removed, as was also a hideous imitation linoleum of painted yellow and black diamonds, and the original lighting by horn lanterns replaced. In order to obtain the money for the work, Lady Fisher wrote to Sir Evan McGregor, who was then Secretary of the Admiralty, and, by enlisting his support, succeeded in obtaining the authorization for the necessary expenditure. The King was therefore able to see this part of the ship as it was on that memorable day, 21st October, 1805.

An interesting sequel to this visit has been mentioned by Fisher in his *Records*:

> I can say I never more enjoyed such a visit. The only thing was, I wasn't master in my own house. The King arranged who should come to dinner, and himself arranged how everyone should

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sit at table ; I never had a look in. Not only this, but he also had the cook up every morning. She was absolutely the best cook I have ever known. She was cheap at £100 a year. She was a remarkably lovely young woman. She died suddenly walking across a hay-field. The King gave her some decoration ; I can't remember what it was. Some little time after the King had left, one night I said to the butler at dinner, " This soup was never made by Mrs. Baker. Is she ill ? " The butler replied, " No, Sir John ; Mrs. Baker isn't ill. She has been invited by His Majesty the King to stay at Buckingham Palace." And that is the first I had heard of it. Mrs. Baker had two magnificent kitchen-maids of her own choosing, and thought she wouldn't be missed. I had an interview with Mrs. Baker on her return from her Royal visit, and she told me the King had said to her one morning before he left Admiralty House, Portsmouth, that he thought she would enjoy seeing how a great State dinner was managed, and told her he would ask her to stay at Buckingham Palace or Windsor Castle, to see one ! Which is only one more exemplification of what I said of King Edward in my first book, that he had an astounding aptitude of appealing to the hearts of both High and Low.

It had been more or less arranged when Fisher went to Portsmouth that he was to relieve Lord Walter Kerr as First Sea Lord when the latter vacated that post. Several details, however, had to be settled in the autumn of 1904 before the appointment was definitely made. Fisher had no intention of going to the Admiralty unless he had the backing of the First Lord in giving effect to the reforms that he had set his heart on introducing ; Lord Selborne, on the other hand, was anxious to learn the nature of these reforms.

On the 26th July Fisher wrote :

Selborne has been trying to draw me ; but I have steadfastly declined to say a word or write a line before I am installed on Trafalgar Day. One exception. I drew up a scheme for the reorganization of the Admiralty. He has swallowed it whole and got the Order in Council for it. The new scheme gives me nothing to do ! It also resuscitates the old titles of " Sea Lords," dating

from A.D. 1613; but which some silly ass some hundred years ago altered to "Naval Lords." . . .

Someone told me the other day that jealousy was the shadow of love.

Wisely he took the First Lord into his confidence. A month later he wrote:

Selborne came here, and was so cordial and responsive that I made the plunge, and with *immense success*. He has swallowed it all whole, though I fully explained to him that, in accepting it all, he was writing himself down a fool for not having done it all sooner. I sat him in an arm-chair in my office, and shook my fist in his face for two and a quarter hours without a check; then he read 120 pages of foolscap, and afterwards collapsed. "New measures demand new men," and he has agreed to all the new blood I want. Of course everyone will say that I have "packed" the Admiralty with my creatures. (Very sorry, but I can't help it.) Selborne has also agreed to my being President of a Committee to devise new types of fighting ships. I explained to him that I had got the designs out of what had to be; but it was a politic thing to have a committee of good names, and then Tommy Bowles and others will fire away at them and leave me alone. . . . I am frightfully busy, as I am busy now with many things. I feel like an elephant's trunk, one moment picking up a pin and the next rooting up an oak.

Only in one matter did Lord Selborne call a halt, and that was Fisher's drastic proposals regarding the Coastguard. The way was now smooth, and on 21st October Fisher's flag was hauled down for the last time from the mainmast of the *Victory*, the ship he had joined as a boy fifty years before.

Postscript

In 1902 Lord Charles Beresford, in an interview, gave the following as his opinion of Fisher's scheme for naval education:

The strongest opponents of the scheme will acknowledge that it is

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a brilliant and statesmanlike effort to grapple with a problem *upon the sound settlement of which the future efficiency of the British Navy depends.* To-day the Commander of Fleets must possess a greater combination of characteristics than has ever before been required of him. He must not only be a born leader of men, but he must have the practical scientific training which the development of mechanical invention renders an absolute and indispensable essential. The executive officer of to-day should possess an intimate knowledge of all that relates to his profession. Up to now he has been fairly educated in its different branches. The most important, however, in that we depend entirely upon it, that relating to steam and machinery, has been sadly neglected. The duties of this branch have been delegated to, and well and loyally performed by, a body of officers existing for this special purpose, and there have been two results. *The executive has remained ignorant of one of the most important parts of his profession; the Engineer has never received that recognition to which the importance of his duties and responsibilities justly entitles him.* The Board of Admiralty have now unanimously approved a plan which provides that naval officers shall have an opportunity of adding to their professional attainments the essential knowledge of marine engineering. Further than this, the Board have recognized that the present status of naval Engineer officers could not continue, in fairness either to themselves or to the Service. *The abolition of distinction regarding entry has settled this point once and for ever, and it is satisfactory to find that constituted authority has taken the matter in hand before it became a political or party question.*

There seems to be a doubt as to whether it will be possible under the new scheme for an executive officer to have the knowledge he should possess of marine engineering. There is no iron-cast secret or mystery with regard to marine engineering, as some seem to imagine. This being so, there is no reason why Lieutenants (E.) should not be just as good and useful experts in their speciality as the gunnery, torpedo, or navigating Lieutenant of the present day, without in the slightest degree detracting from their ability to become excellent executive officers. It is imperative that all officers of the present day should be well acquainted with all the general duties connected with the management of ships and fleets. The wider and fuller the education the naval officer receives in matters relating to science within his own profession, the more likely the Service is to produce men who will be capable of seeing

that the Fleet in its entirety is perfect for its work, and that there is no weak link in the chain that may jeopardize the whole.

The memo. referring to the Marines will be, I believe, received with the greatest satisfaction by that splendid corps as a whole, as by the Service as a whole. *It is a marvel that the zeal and ability of the officers of the Royal Marines have not been effectively utilized long ago.* Many important positions will now be open to them, and *they will feel that they are taking a real part in the executive working of the ship and fleet which is so proud to own them as a component part.* It is to be hoped that the way will now be open to give them appointments as general officers commanding at many of the naval bases.

No part of the scheme will give the Service in its entirety more sincere pleasure than the improvements promised with regard to the position of the Warrant officers. Promotion of Warrant officers to Lieutenant's rank has long been urged by those who argued that the lower deck were fully entitled to a right that had from time immemorial been enjoyed by the non-commissioned ranks of the sister Service. Placing the signal ratings on an equality with gunnery and torpedo ratings is of far more importance than is generally realized. The vital necessity of a good line of communication and good signalmen has never been thoroughly appreciated.

I consider the return to the early age of entry of infinite value. It has not yet been decided whether on first going to sea midshipmen will be appointed to ships ordinarily in commission or to ships specially in commission for training purposes. I am strongly of opinion that it would be by far the best plan to send them to learn their duties in the ordinary ships of the regularly commissioned Fleet. With regard to the proposed arrangement of nomination to branches in the hands of the constituted authorities, in my opinion this gives the best young officer the fairest chance of holding the best positions.

In conclusion, I am of the opinion that the plan is one that has been thoroughly matured and well thought out, and I believe that when its details have been definitely settled it will make more complete the well-being, contentment, and efficiency of that Service on which the safety of the Empire absolutely depends.

PART II

1904—1910

IT is impossible, without confusion of narrative, to deal chronologically with Sir John Fisher's work as First Sea Lord. His many activities ran concurrently during the whole of the period that he held this office. The design of the *Dreadnought*, and the reforms which he instituted, started controversies that persisted and grew stronger, rather than weaker, as time went on. The indiscipline of Lord Charles Beresford, which culminated in a Cabinet inquiry into the charges that he had made against Admiralty administration, forms an unfortunate episode which extended over two years. The political situation in Europe, and especially our relations with Germany; the 1909–10 building programme, which nearly precipitated a Cabinet crisis; and, finally, Fisher's resignation, each form a complete narrative. All idea of dealing with these subjects strictly in chronological order has therefore been discarded, and they will receive separate treatment in the following chapters:

CHAPTER IX. ADMIRAL SIR JOHN FISHER, FIRST SEA LORD.
CHAPTER X. THE "DREADNOUGHT."
CHAPTER XI. THE MAJOR REFORMS.
CHAPTER XII. THE MINOR REFORMS.
CHAPTER XIII. LORD CHARLES BERESFORD.
CHAPTER XIV. GENERAL WORK AS FIRST SEA LORD.

CHAPTER IX

ADMIRAL SIR JOHN FISHER, FIRST SEA LORD

Sir John Fisher is ninety-five per cent. genius with five per cent. of devil.—An American Critic.

Synopsis of his career—The foundations of his character—Patriotism—Vitality—His religious views—Biblical knowledge—Consultation with others—Affection he created in others—Fidelity of Mr. George Lambert—As a disciplinarian—Thoughtfulness for those under him—Not vindictive—His propensity for dancing—Personality—Some descriptions—Princess Olga—King Edward and the dancing lesson—His appearance.

WE have in the previous chapters recorded the salient points in Fisher's career since he entered the Navy. Throughout this period he had been under the orders and control of some superior authority; he was now about to become the technical Head of the Navy, subject mainly to the consultative agreement of the First Lord of the Admiralty and to the Cabinet. It is fitting at this moment to pause and attempt to convey some idea of Fisher's personality, since it was on his extraordinary magnetic influence that the success or failure of the reforms he was about to introduce largely depended. It must be clearly understood that no writer, however capable a judge of character or however versatile, has made, or ever can possibly make, "Jacky Fisher" as he really was to live again for the benefit of those who never saw or knew him.

It is difficult enough to describe a man who differs but little from the normal run of mankind. How can

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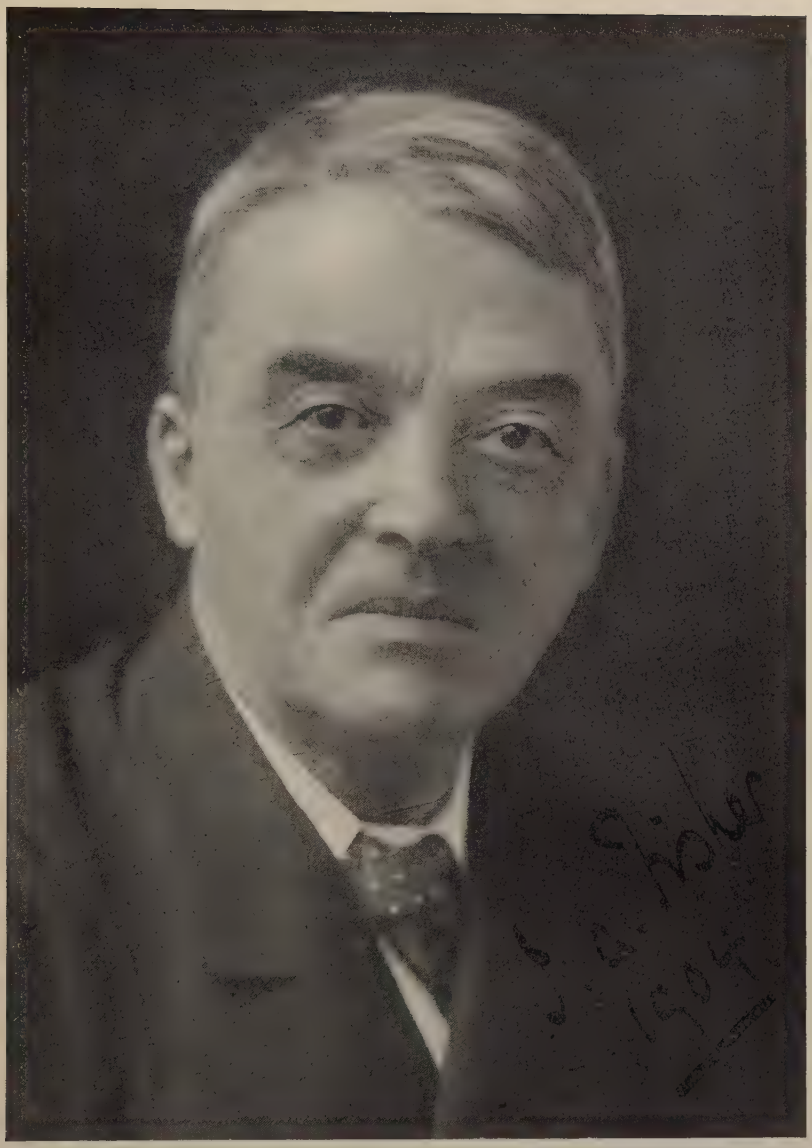
success be achieved when portraying one of whom a close observer wrote :

> I have known personally a dozen of men who have been in my time among the most remarkable and famous men in the world ; Lord Fisher was the most fascinating of them all, and the least like any other man.[1]

Since it is impossible to describe personality in mere words, the more abnormal the personality the more difficult description becomes. Let us briefly recapitulate the chief points in Fisher's previous career.

He entered the Navy as a friendless boy, and within one year he had gained the confidence of his Captain, and soon after was turned over by him to the Commander-in-Chief of the Station, who at once recognized his ability, and made him his personal A.D.C. and private secretary. He had had his baptism of fire in a small but severe action ; and had commanded a man-of-war when nineteen years of age. Every Captain with whom he had served had asked for him to remain in his ship. He had passed all his examinations with flying colours ; gained golden opinions as a gunnery officer ; and had been appointed gunnery Lieutenant of the first of our all-iron ships. He then had swung to torpedo work, pioneered the introduction of mines and locomotive torpedoes into the Navy, and started and organized the *Vernon* Torpedo School. He had commanded the *Inflexible*, the last word in battleship strength, at the bombardment of Alexandria ; and commanded with conspicuous success the naval forces landed there. At the Admiralty, in the face of almost insuperable opposition, he had wrested the design and storage of naval ordnance and ordnance stores from the War Office, and had seen them turned over to the

[1] Mr. J. L. Garvin.



ADMIRAL SIR JOHN FISHER, G.C.B.
First Sea Lord of the Admiralty

Admiralty. As Admiral Superintendent of a dock-yard he had inaugurated the rapid building of ships, cutting down the time of battleship construction from three and four years to two years. As Controller of the Navy, in the face of violent political opposition, he had introduced water-tube boilers into the Navy.

He—the most militant of naval officers—had been selected by the Prime Minister then in office, entirely on account of his sterling qualities, to represent the Navy at The Hague Peace Conference. There he had gained a European reputation. Ever afterwards, when war clouds began to gather, the name of Fisher was muttered at the conclaves of the Chancelleries of Europe. Thus one of the most combative of officers became a potent factor in preserving the peace of the world.

Lastly, as Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean he had broken through every tradition, by taking into his confidence all the thinking officers of his Fleet, and co-ordinating the most modern ideas of the Navy. Metaphorically he had acted the part of a huge sifting machine, collecting ideas, separating the crude from the mature, and returning the refined article to the Fleet for the instruction of the officers and men. At the same time he had gained a unique knowledge of the thoughts and aspirations of the men, and an intimate acquaintance with those matters wherein reform was required.

Fisher so far, in his naval career, had never made a mistake. He was about to leave active sea-going life and was on the eve of taking up an office which would entail administrative duties, which would give him the opportunity of introducing those reforms of which the Navy stood in so great a need. He

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would have to face opposition, fight departments and politicians, convince Ministers, and satisfy public opinion. What manner of man was this phenomenally successful seaman, who was now to deal with matters of State, and defeat crafty party wire-pullers ?

Let us first examine the foundations on which his character was based and see how they affected his personality.

He had a marvellous memory, keen, quick perception, a ready and agile mind, a sound judgment, an insatiable love of work, and strong religious feeling. Naturally the association of the Navy with the history of his country created in him a fervent patriotism, while the ever-changing interests of sea-life in the old sailing days and its one thousand and one technical interests engendered a love of his profession.

These two passions of patriotism and love of the Navy mingled indissolubly and formed the dominating influence of his life. To him they seemed to be synonymous, and caused him to become the champion of every kind of naval reform ; for, by furthering anything by which the Navy might benefit, he insured the greater safety of his country. His slogan became, " The efficiency of the Navy and its instant readiness for war."

But, apart altogether from these main influences that determined his line of conduct and his career, he possessed a variety of lesser attributes which went far to create a unique personality. Chief among these must be accounted a sense of humour and a ready wit ; his capacious memory stored anecdote, phrase, and simile, which flashed out at opportune moments. He was possessed of a wonderful vitality which showed itself continually in force of argument, in debate, in

gesture, and in broad splashes of underlining in his writing. The strong religious convictions of his youth gradually discarded the narrow limits of dogma, and crystallized around the fundamental truths of primitive Christian teaching. He appreciated a good sermon ; but, even more than attending church services, he loved to sit and meditate in some church or cathedral, communing in solitude and silence. He was especially affected by the grandeur and solemnity of Westminster Abbey. Practically every day when in London he would spend some time in that Valhalla, finding a never-ceasing solace from the worries of his official life, wrapt in meditation and surrounded, in spirit, by the illustrious dead.

He had a firm belief in Divine intervention in the affairs of this life ; if he had doubts about justice in this world, he had none about matters being evened out in the next ! " The Lord God of recompence will surely requite " was the thought with which he was wont to comfort himself, drawing from it almost Davidian consolation. He was convinced that the Day of Judgment would one day come along, and then the men, and the Society ladies who had laboured for their own friends under the cloak of working for the Navy, would get their just reward. Any desire he might have to strike down an enemy in this world was largely satisfied by remembering Dean Page Roberts's remark that " There was no Bankruptcy Act in Heaven, no ten shillings in the pound there ; every moral debt had to be paid in full." His religion was in many respects a primitive and rugged religion ; but it was all the more sincere for its directness. An ardent admirer of Joshua, David, and St. Paul, as well as of Nelson, he firmly believed in the prayer, " O

Lord, arise, and let thine enemies be scattered," being answered; but, at the same time, he believed in his countrymen doing their fair share of the scattering. His knowledge both of the New and the Old Testaments was prodigious; he always had an apt quotation ready, and his letters teem with Biblical extracts. He was not averse to quoting against himself.

In one letter to the Dean of Wells (Armitage Robinson) he wrote pathetically during the war:

> Moses prepared his people forty years for the war in the Holy Land, but he didn't go over Jordan; though his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. Perhaps I have spoken unadvisedly with my lips, like Moses, and been punished accordingly.

There is little doubt that one characteristic more than any other that ensured his success in the Navy was a marked disposition to learn from everyone with whom he came in contact. When a Commander, he consulted freely with the other officers and petty officers on matters connected with the routine drills, and the general work of the ship, and throughout his life he was ever ready to learn from those whose opinions he valued. This is a rare quality. The majority of men of action are apt to become ingrained with a firm belief that they have a greater knowledge in all matters that concern their profession than their juniors can possibly possess; and they therefore rarely, if ever, consult those below them. More especially is this the case in a profession like the Navy, where discipline compels deference on the part of a junior to the opinions of those senior to him. It is beyond question that Fisher's insight into the problems of the Navy was largely derived from widespread consultation with all classes and ranks in the Service.

His memory stored the grains of knowledge so acquired, and prolonged cogitation, aided by his own sure judgment, pieced them together. The result was a store of accurate knowledge which was a great asset; for, in argument, it assured him a thorough knowledge of the whole range of naval subjects, and gave him a goodly array of sound reasonings in support of his contentions.

There was yet another characteristic which singled him out from among his contemporaries, and that was the genuine affection which he created as a young man in the majority of his messmates, an affection, moreover, that survived tens of years in the memories of men who never met or served with him subsequently during their careers in the Navy. Many men are looked on as "good fellows"; many pleasant recollections linger in a man's mind of messmates who have been above the average in wit, humour, or good fellowship; but it is an astonishing thing to find on reading present-day letters from men who knew and served with Fisher fifty years ago, how a real *affection* for him has survived this great lapse of time. Not only was he voted "the life and soul of the mess," but a great personal regard for the young gunnery Lieutenant or Commander stands recorded in a really remarkable manner. In later years this same magnetic personality had by no means faded. It procured for him devoted adherents among those around him. Naval officers with whom he worked came under this spell, journalists inspired by his teachings sacrificed temporal benefits to become his prophets, and politicians felt his sway, even to the extent of exclusion from office; as evidenced by the fidelity of Mr. George Lambert, who twice during the war refused

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to serve in the Government of the day unless Lord Fisher were recalled as First Sea Lord.

In spite of this good fellowship and kindliness we find that he was, in matters of importance, a rigid disciplinarian; he never allowed his natural soft-heartedness to override his sense of duty. A seaman, whether officer or man, demands of his Captain, or Commander, two main qualities: he must have the knowledge and capacity necessary to make the ship smart, and he must be just. He may be severe, he may, in order to make the ship smart, work the men to the bone—no one minds that; but he must be just, and the ship must be the smartest on the station. These two qualities Fisher possessed to an exceptional degree: he worked the men till they were tired out; to use his own expression, he "gave the ship's company 'hell' for three months," and they liked it, because they saw the underlying reason and the necessity for it; and they learned to love their Captain, in spite of the fact that one day, shortly after commissioning, he read out forty punishment warrants.

In all matters the Navy came first; sentiment came second. To an officer who had committed himself he said, "I am very sorry for your wife and children, but in war-time I would have had you shot."

Yet in matters of discipline he was not obstinate. In the *Pallas*, on the representations of their messmates, he rescinded his intention to court-martial two officers; and later on, when First Sea Lord, he interceded with the First Lord in the case of an Admiral who was on the point of being superseded, and obtained for him a further chance of obeying the orders that had been given to him by the Admiralty.

He was particularly kind to youngsters ; he seemed always to remember his own friendlessness when he entered the Service and how much he had owed to the kindness of Captain Shadwell. The following story illustrates his thoughtfulness for one of the most junior officers in the Navy.

When he was Second Sea Lord, he received a letter from a man of whom he had never heard, saying that his son, a young midshipman, had written home that he was very unhappy in the ship in which he was serving, and that he would be driven to desert. Fisher at the time was away from London inspecting the various training-ships. He at once told the Secretary of the Admiralty, who was with him, to wire to the Admiralty and have the boy transferred to another ship, as he was convinced that the lad was being bullied. But the matter did not end there. That evening Fisher arrived at Dartmouth, and at once had the boy's record when a naval cadet in the *Britannia* looked up. It proved to be a good one. Fisher had been thinking a good deal about the case all day, and, on reading the record, he turned to the Secretary and said, " Perhaps at the Admiralty they have not treated this case as urgent. Wire at once to the Commander-in-Chief of the station to have the boy transferred to his flagship. Who knows, the lad might desert to-night." It was characteristic of Fisher that, in spite of the preoccupations of his day's work, and the variety of discussions inherent in the inspections on which he was engaged, he found time to pay minute attention to the troubles of a boy on some distant station, whom he had never seen and of whose parents he had never heard.

All the characteristics we have noted in the early

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chapters of his youth clung to Fisher and were present in 1904; but, naturally, they were toned down by age and experience. His physical exuberance developed into literary and conversational profusion; he spoke, wrote, and thought in large type and italics; when writing he underlined his argument with two, three, or even four strokes with a broad-nibbed pen, and when talking, with blows of his fist on the palm of the other hand. "I wish you would stop shaking your fist in my face," said King Edward when being subjected to some of Fisher's forcible arguments; and every one of his many listeners might have made the same remark.

He never played field games or indulged in any form of athletics; his one form of taking exercise was by walking. He was not in any way fond of sport. Apparently when a youth he shot Lady Horton's butler in mistake for a rabbit, which put an end to his shooting career. The man does not seem to have been much hurt, for Fisher's only comment was that "he was a pompous old fellow and it did him good." He, however, took great interest in the inter-ship football and cricket matches, hating to see his ship beaten, and encouraged boat-sailing and regattas in the Fleet.

It is rather doubtful if Fisher ever looked on anyone of his many opponents as his personal enemy. The men who appeared to be his enemies were opponents of his naval reforms, and he did not regard them as his own foes, but enemies of the Navy.

Only one man did he detest cordially, one who had lied gratuitously about him. He never failed to characterize this man in his correspondence as "the Cad"; him he did hate, and probably would not have

been particularly sorry had he met some unpleasant fate; but even this man he looked on as too far beneath him to warrant verbal castigation beyond the epithet referred to. He regarded Lord Charles Beresford, who had tried him more highly than most men are tried, as an irresponsible Irishman too much swayed by his *entourage*. There was no personal animus; he never referred to him in his correspondence in terms of obloquy.

The editor of a paper who had accused him of buying land near Osborne in order to make money out of the knowledge that the college was going to be built there, and of doing the same thing with land near Rosyth when that large northern dockyard was on the *tapis*, was treated by him in his letters more with sorrow and regret that a man, otherwise sound, should have gone astray, rather than with personal animosity. No! The three R's—Ruthless, Relentless, Remorseless—which he claimed as his attributes when dealing with the affairs of the Navy, were never applied by him to those who had treated him personally in a shabby or unfair manner.

The following should give the lie to the accusation of vindictiveness which has been so freely levelled at him by those who only judged him by his words, and not by his deeds. Among his papers we found the following letter:

My dear Fisher,

Some years ago you and I used to exchange friendly letters. Then I went on the war-path, got the worst of it, and went to the wall. *Vae victis.* I am dying of cancer, and I want to see my eldest son before I die. If the presence of the —— in the South Atlantic does not form the keystone of the naval strategic arch, and if she should find herself in some British port some day soon, you will receive a dying man's blessing.

The appointment of Lieutenants was not, at the time, a part of Fisher's duty. He might merely have passed the letter on to the person concerned and taken no action himself. However, on the letter is a pencil note :

> This is an Admiral who, from being my close friend, became my malignant enemy. I have telegraphed for his son to come home by next mail steamer from Cape Horn.

Pinned to the first letter was a second, in a very shaky writing. It was of three words only : " God bless you ! "

How dangerous it is to judge a man by casual words, written or spoken is shown by the fact that Fisher, who had gone out of his way to do this kind action, wrote to a friend when in a whimsical vein : " I have never cut anyone in my life (they cut me). You lose the opportunity of being disagreeable to them."

It was not so much the Navy, as the Navy at war, that was ever before Fisher's eyes. Most officers visualize the Navy as it is in its daily life in peace-time. Fisher had no use for a peace Navy. Instant readiness for war was his one test, the touchstone by which to judge the efficiency of all administrative details. He hated war ; he looked on it as a barbaric institution ; but since wars had to be, he was determined that the Navy should be in a position to meet war whenever it came, with full confidence of victory.

At the time of which we are writing, when Fisher went, full of energy, to the Admiralty as First Sea Lord, he was, for a masterful man, singularly free from great defects. His failings were in reality the exaggerations of his virtues. He was careless of the opinions of others. Always twenty years ahead of

the age, in small things as well as in great, he would dance the whole of an evening and perhaps several in succession with the same partner. This in those days earned him the reputation of being a Don Juan, a reputation totally undeserved. In greater matters he was, as events showed, too confident; he had too great a belief in his powers to demolish obstruction and persuade dissentients. His conversation and writing tended too much towards exaggeration. But in 1904 he was singularly free from the defects which his subsequent service at the Admiralty developed in him. He had, up to that time, had little personal dealing with politicians; he had not learned from them the tricks and devious courses which are the arteries and veins of political life. He had not learned to bow the knee to expediency. As King Edward told him, "He had been round the world, but had never been in it." He started his Crusade of Reform placing too high a hope on the single-mindedness of politicians. He was to learn much, and a good deal of what he did learn in the next five years affected his outlook on life from the worldly, rather than from the ethical, point of view.

It is impossible adequately to describe Fisher's personality.

> Why I so hate a book [he wrote], is that the printed word never can convey the virtue of the soul. Personality, which is the soul of man, is absent from the reader. The man who reads this in his arm-chair in the Athenæum Club would take it all quite differently if I could walk up and down in front of him and shake my fist in his face.

No truer words were ever written. It is as impossible to express the chiaroscuro of character and per-

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sonality by writing, as it is to convey the glory of a summer border by the medium of ordinary photography. Impossible as this is in the case of the generality of men, it becomes even more so when writing of John Arbuthnot Fisher, a man unique among men, the embodiment of fiery energy which knew no bounds, an energy that ran riot in his daily work, his conversations, and his writings. He has been described as "a tornado with a nib at the end of it." This well describes his writings. In conversations he might equally well be described as a "fist-shaking whirlwind"; he was, in fact, a cyclone both in conversation and with his pen, and, indeed, a curiously unconventional cyclone.

The editor of one of our most important papers,[1] who knew him well, wrote:

> He whips off your head with a joke in the midst of a genial torrent of talk. If he suspects you, he will not write to you. He takes you by the arm and pours out that astonishing stream of talk, and then just when you, good easy man, think how well you stand with the Admiral, there leaps out a sudden sword and you are pinned past escape. For he believes that truth comes out in talking. "Set a man before a sheet of paper," he says in his epigrammatic way, "and he has time to tell lies." He talks in crisp phrases. "Life is phrases," is a favourite saying of his. He coins his phrases out of the ore of his own quarrying. They are his condensed comments on the experience of a lifetime, and he uses them as Mr. Chamberlain used them, to drill an idea into the mind of the public. I have said that he is as pertinacious as a debt collector. You cannot shake him nor his phrases off; they both stick.

And yet another close observer[2] concludes his impressions thus:

> His ideas and paradoxes either paralysed or maddened the

[1] Mr. A. G. Gardiner.

[2] Mr. J. L. Garvin.

orthodox. He seemed to them to be brilliantly insane, while he, with more reason, thought they were respectable imbeciles.

In short, he was the genius incarnate of technical change.

Then there was a giant in command. His physical energy and fertility of mind seemed inexhaustible. Even when out of office, owing to an absurd adherence to a mechanical law of seniority, his counsels and expostulations were ceaseless, and behind the scenes the influence of his urging genius never slept.

His impressions then concluded with the paragraph that we have already quoted:

I have known personally a dozen of men who have been in my time among the most remarkable and famous men in the world; Lord Fisher was the most fascinating of them all, and the least like any other man.

He was severe, and his subordinates often were frightened before they had learned to know him. Every ship to which he was appointed feared his coming only one degree less than they lamented his leaving. His anger was never tainted by sullenness.

There was a gleam beneath his utmost violence, a smile that lurked behind those extraordinary eyes. Humour was the breath of life to him, and he would, in the midst of the most relentless pursuit of an idea, break out into a waywardness, enhanced by his childlike joy in shocking or surprising people. He kept the heart of a child, and it was the secret of that amazing vitality and freshness that was always his. Had it not been so, a man so strong, so grim of conviction, so forthright in action, would have hardened into iron. But that "cruel mouth," as it was called, never forgot how to smile—and it was a smile that totally changed his expression—and that nature, so stern in many of its public manifestations, never failed to respond to the smallest private sign of affection, admiration, or gratitude. It was part of the ardour and generosity of his character to be responsive, and so perceptive of the real humanity of the person who approached him, whether a housemaid or a princess, a bluejacket or a Privy Councillor.[1]

[1] Mr. E. Hallam Moorhouse.

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Of his home life we get but faint glimpses. Early to bed and early up in the mornings, writing hard before breakfast. Reading newspapers insatiably in the evenings. Occasionally playing a game of backgammon or piquet, but generally late home from the Admiralty with but little time for games. When at Malta or Portsmouth he walked almost daily with one of the members of his family, preferring the level and smooth paths of a garden or avenue to the rougher roads. Often for the whole of such walks he would be wrapped in thought. Always thinking out, always scheming for the good of the Navy. In truth, all his later years he lived for the Navy and the Navy only. At Malta he enjoyed dining in the summer on guest nights at the Sliema Club, the host of a party of his officers and their wives ; at Portsmouth he entertained liberally and made an excellent host.

His table allowance never sufficed. He wrote :

> My finances have always been at a low ebb (even when a Commander-in-Chief), as I went on the principle of " whatever you do, do it with all your might," and there is nothing less conducive to fighting efficiency of a fleet and its instant readiness for war than a stingy Admiral ! The applications for subscriptions which were rained on me I countered with this inestimable memorandum in reply, invented by my sympathetic secretary : " The Admiral regrets deeply being unable to comply with your request, and he deplores the reason—but his expenditure is in excess of his receipts." I always got sympathy in return.

Indeed, he had but little spare money. Once a year he took the whole family to the theatre—a great treat —Fisher enjoying it as much as the children ; in fact, so bent were they on missing nothing that they invariably arrived before the curtain was raised.

He was wonderfully expert with his pen. His

letters are, to use a phrase of his own coining, "the Bovril" of expression.

The following piece of racy writing, written when he was seventy-eight years old,[1] gives a better insight into several of Fisher's characteristics than could be conveyed by pages of description. He is writing about the Grand Duchess Olga, the youngest sister of the late Czar:

She is a peculiarly sweet creature. Her nickname amongst the Russians was "Sunshine." Stolypin, the Prime Minister, told me that; and he also said to me that she was a kind of lifebuoy, because if you walked about with her you would not get bombed by an anarchist. All loved her.

I made her acquaintance first at Carlsbad. On my arrival at the hotel, I found King Edward's equerry waiting in the hall. I had written to tell the King, who was at Marienbad, in answer to his inquiry, as to the day I should arrive and what time. . . . I went over there and then and found him [the King] just finishing lunch with a peculiarly charming-looking young lady, who turned out to be the Grand Duchess Olga, and her husband the Grand Duke of Oldenburg, from whom happily she is now divorced (I didn't like the look of him at all). The King, having satisfied himself that I had had lunch, and he then smoking a cigar as big as a capstan bar, after talking of various things which interested him, told me that his niece the Grand Duchess Olga did not know anyone in Carlsbad, and he relied on me to make her time there pleasant; so I promptly asked her if she could waltz. She said she loved it, but she somehow never got the step properly, whereupon I asked the King if he had any objection to getting into the corner of the room while I moved the table and got up the rugs to give Her Imperial Highness a lesson. He made some little difficulty at first, but eventually went into the corner; and when the lesson began he was quite pleased and clapped his hands and called out "Bravo!" The best waltz tune in the world is one of Moody and Sankey's hymns. I don't know whether Sankey originated the saying that he didn't see why the Devil should have all the good music. I don't by that implicate that the waltz was

[1] The episode took place ten years before.

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the Devil's ; but without any doubt there is a good deal of temptation in it, and when you get a good partner you cleave to her all the evening.

The dancing lesson was an unalloyed success, so I asked her to a dance the next evening at the Savoy Hotel ; and after some more words with the King I left ; and walking down the stairs to go to my hotel, I thought to myself : " How on earth are you going to get up a dance when you don't know a soul in the place ? " when whom should I meet but a friend of mine, a Spanish grandee, the Marquis of Villa Vieja, and he arranged what really turned out to be a ball, as he knew everybody ; and I, having some dear American friends at Marienbad, telegraphed them to come over and dine with the Grand Duchess and stay the night for the ball, and they did. When the dance had begun, and the Grand Duchess was proving quite equal to her lesson of the day before, suddenly an apparition of extraordinary grace and loveliness appeared at the door. Villa Vieja took on the Grand Duchess and I welcomed the beautiful Polish Countess and danced with her many waltzes running, in spite of a hint I received that her husband was very jealous and a renowned duellist. Next day, by telegram from the King, I was told that Isvolsky, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, was to be asked by me to lunch on his arrival from St. Petersburg. I invited him ; and just as we sat down to lunch, the Polish Angel of the night before came through the door and petrified Isvolsky, and the more so as she kissed her hand to me. He never took his eyes off her, and as she walked to her table I heard him breathe a sigh, and say, *sotto voce*, " Alas ! in Heaven no woman ! " I said to him, " Monsieur Isvolsky, pray pardon me ; perhaps you did not intend it to be heard, but if it be true what you say, it takes away much of the charm which I had anticipated finding there." He turned to me and said, quoting chapter and verse in the Revelation, " There was silence in heaven ! "

So when I met the Grand Duchess Olga again, when I accompanied King Edward on that memorable visit to Reval—when, as Prince Orloff, the Emperor's principal Aide-de-camp, said to me, " King Edward changed the atmosphere of Russian feelings towards England from suspicion to cordial trust "—there was quite an affectionate meeting, and we danced the " Merry Widow " waltz, to make the Empress of Russia laugh. They told me she had not laughed for two years. At the banquet preceding the dance the Grand Duchess and I, I regret to say, made such a dis-

turbance in our mutual jokes that King Edward called out to me that I must try to remember that it was not the midshipmen's mess; and my dear Grand Duchess thought I should be sent to Siberia or somewhere. We sailed at daylight, and I got a letter from her when I arrived in England saying she had made a point of seeing Uncle Bertie, and that it was all right; I was not going to be punished. Then she went on to describe that she had had a very happy day (being her birthday) picnicking in the woods; the only drawback was, she told me, that the gnats would bite her ankles. Being, at that period, both a courtier and a sycophant, I telegraphed to her at some palace she was at in Russia to say, "I wished to God I had been one of the gnats." It was weeks before she got the telegram, as the Russian Secret Department believed it was from some anarchist, and was a cipher for bombing the Emperor or something of the sort, and there was a lot of bother to trace out who had sent it.

Well, there you have Fisher! Sixty-eight years old, but a boy still. How well he describes the scene! King Edward with his big cigar being pushed into a corner while Fisher pulled up the carpets. Then the next evening, dancing with the Grand Duchess until a more beautiful lady arrived, whom he at once proceeds to monopolize. The heart-stricken Empress forced to laugh. Then his reprimand from the King for behaving like a midshipman; and the end-up with the telegram that was far more likely to come from Fisher than a courtier. Delightful exaggeration everywhere. No one could read the above without being carried away by the fun of the whole thing. It is truly typical of Fisher, Fisher at his best, in a holiday mood.

Should the reader wish to know what Fisher was like externally, he should look at the photographs in this book. There he will see the shell, the husk devoid of the kernel of personality.

Fisher was of medium height and square of build,

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with very round, wide-open eyes, which fixed the gaze and compelled attention. His general expression was slightly supercilious, which, however, was constantly changing during conversation to a flickering smile, for an undercurrent of humour always pervaded his general talk. You felt all the time during your first interview with him that you were being weighed in the scales, and soon discovered if you had been found to be wanting; for Fisher wasted no time on persons, male or female, with whom he was not *en rapport*. If you, on the other hand, passed muster, then, whatever your rank, he would talk to you as an equal without any attempt at self-assertion.

But descriptions are quite useless, for even after these or any further stray notes have been read and assimilated, the picture they conjure up may give some idea of the sort of man that Fisher was in 1904, but most assuredly they do not portray "Jacky" (as we used to love to call him). The skeleton is there, the backbone of which was "The efficiency of the Navy and its instant readiness for war." The mechanism of his life, its dominating purpose, we can gather, but these did not alone build up "Jacky" as we knew him, with his head thrown back, lips slightly parted, eyes a trifle vacant, as he listened to the thrust in controversy; then would come the sudden flash of animation, then the riposte, the flood of argument, the Biblical quotation punctuated by gesture and hammer-blows of the fist on the hand; and in the end the talk invariably ended with a smile on the face of all who had been listening to him.

> To those who knew thee not no words can paint,
> And those who knew thee know all words are faint.

CHAPTER X

THE "DREADNOUGHT"

The "Dreadnought," whatever else it did or did not do, accomplished the following strategical effects:

I. It converted the Kiel Canal into a useless ditch requiring eleven millions sterling of money, and eight years in time, to restore the use of the Baltic to the German first-class battleships.

II. It suspended foreign construction of all battleships for nineteen months, thereby giving us the priceless advantage of a start that foreigners can never make good if the Cabinet is awake and alive.

III. It compelled the Germans to remove their mud banks and deepen their harbours in the North Sea, thus enabling the British Admiral to get at them in time of war with thirty pre-Dreadnought ships, whose deep draught [formerly] denied them access to the German coasts.

CONTEMPORARY CRITIC.

Sir Robert Arbuthnot and Sir John Fisher—*Athanasius contra Mundum*—Battle ranges—Questions of policy—Reasons for building the *Dreadnought*—Impolitic to disclose real reason—The *Invincible*—Reasons for building her—Reason for heavy-gun armament of the large cruisers—Design Committee—Terms of reference—Work of the Committee—Details of building the *Dreadnought*—The turbine machinery—Reasons for introduction—The trials of the *Dreadnought*—Troubles—Fisher's foresight in building—How our lead was obtained.

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IT has already been shown that Fisher's period of command in the Mediterranean was a time of inspiration, not only for the officers serving under his command, but also for himself. His close contact with the latest developments of long-range gunnery, and the inferences to be drawn from the results of the various trials, impressed him most forcibly with the view that the class of battleship which at that time was the latest and best product of the designer's brain was not the type most suitable

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for naval actions of the near future. If, as he became convinced would happen, a distance of seven or eight thousand yards became the normal battle range, then the armament of our large ships should be designed so as to obtain the maximum number of hits at that range.

On his return to the Admiralty he was at first mainly occupied with his scheme for modernizing the education of the young naval officers, for education in all branches came under his direct supervision as Second Sea Lord. Ship design and construction was the special province of the Controller of the Navy, with which, except in Fisher's general capacity as one Member of the Board, it was no business of his to interfere. While at Portsmouth he had, however, learned that he would in due course be asked to succeed the then First Sea Lord, whose term of office was drawing to a close ; he therefore devoted much time and energy to evolving a design of ship more suitable to modern requirements.

It may be asked why he kept silent about this design, and his other reforms, and why he did not attempt earlier to get the Admiralty to initiate some of the measures. The answer is simple ; he knew thoroughly well that it would require all his driving power to carry them through. Any half-hearted adoption of his schemes, by men who were not the originators, would merely have led—had they led anywhere—to an emasculated version of the reforms, and not as he had conceived them. The document quoted below is interesting in this respect. This paper was left, with a sad prophetic instinct, by Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot, to be delivered to Lord Fisher in case of his death, which, most unfor-

tunately for the Navy, occurred at the Battle of Jutland, when his flagship the *Defence* was sunk by the gun fire of the High Seas Fleet. Sir Robert Arbuthnot was Fisher's Flag-Captain at Portsmouth.

Interview with Sir John Fisher, G.C.B., on 6th January, 1904. To be sent to him unopened if I die before he does.

(Int'ed) R.K.A.
6.1. '04.

(On back of envelope it was written, "Sealed 6 Jan. 1904.")

Went in to see Sir John Fisher, Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, in his office about 12.30. Found him writing, and asked him if he wanted to see me about *Victory*. He said "Yes," and got up and stood in front of fire.

I asked him if we [*Victory's* crew] were to go into *Hercules*, and he said "Yes, on 15 Feb. without fail." I told him that the Admiral Superintendent had not got the approval from Admiralty for defects to be taken in hand. He said he didn't care. He would give the approval himself—it had to be done by 15 Feb.

No one but three Chief Warrant Officers and twenty-one privates were to live in the *Victory*. I pointed out that twenty-one men could not cope with the dirt brought on board by 1,000 trippers on a wet Saturday in the summer. "Then tell off a working party to clean her." Then I said I should like to know what he was driving at, and is it all to be permanent? "*Yes, permanent!*" "Always?" "Till I get up to Admiralty; then I'll alter it all! I'm not such a born idiot as to tell all those chaps at the Admiralty what I'm going to do before I go there. Lord Walter (the First Sea Lord) wrote to me only last week and said, 'My dear fellow, I haven't had a letter from you or a report from Portsmouth for 2½ months.' I replied, 'And you won't get any either!' The Admiralty are all a lot of old women and bury their noses in their papers and think out how wide a man's medal ribbon should be, and shut their eyes to what is really going on in the world.

"I tell you I had a man standing in this office a few days ago who has seen a Russian torpedo hitting a small target time after time at 3,000 yards and at 24 knots. We can only do 2,000 yards at 18 knots.

"Soon it will be 5,000 yards, and then where is your gunnery

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going to be ? I have been looking round : I have been on board *Berwick*, and I know the tubes can be lengthened and the new torpedoes carried and fired. But do you think I'm such a born idiot as to write up and tell those fellows all I know ? Wait till I get up there, then I'll burst it on the Navy, and it shall all be done.

" The Fleet Reserve is rotten to the core, and they keep on asking me for report. Think I'm such a born fool as to tell them ? When I get up there I'll alter it all, and those who get in my way had better look out.

" I've ruined about eight men in the last eighteen months, and I'll ruin anyone else who tries to stop me."

I (R.K.A.) laughed, and said, " I hope you won't ruin me," and he replied, " I'd ruin my best friend if necessary for the Service. Mind you, Arbuthnot, I'm talking very confidentially to you, and you mustn't give me away." I said, " I think you may trust me, sir."

I said " Good morning," and remarked that now I knew what he was driving at I would make the *Hercules* and *Victory* go all right, and departed.

(Signed) R. K. ARBUTHNOT.

(written on evening of 6 Jan. '04.)

Fisher wrote in August 1904 :

I join the Admiralty on the 21st October (a good fighting day to begin work !). I am ready for the fray. It will be a case of *Athanasius contra Mundum*. Very sorry for Mundum, as Athanasius is going to win !

His methods at Portsmouth in producing the designs of the battleship " Dreadnought " class and battle-cruiser " Invincible " class (the two designs were taken in hand concurrently) were simple, but effective. Mr. W. H. Gard, the Chief Constructor at Portsmouth Dockyard, advised on questions relating to the hull, weights, and displacements ; Mr. Alexander Gracie, the Managing Director of the Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company, dealt with machinery and boilers ; and various naval

officers assisted in the development of the armament designs. By the 21st October the sketch designs of the *Dreadnought* and *Invincible* were practically complete, and it is interesting to note that these designs subsequently underwent very little alteration.

The reasons for the introduction of the "Dreadnought" design are, even now, so little understood that the subject requires some detailed explanation. No single one of Fisher's naval reforms has been more misrepresented and misunderstood than the adoption of these designs; and even to this day there is an extraordinary lack of knowledge on the subject amongst otherwise well-informed critics.

Until the year 1903 the fighting range of the battleship was about 3,000 yards. Led on by successes reported to have been obtained at the French and Italian gunnery trials, long-range shooting was started in our Fleet in 1898, and promising results were obtained. The trials were continued, and while Fisher was in the Mediterranean they showed that five or six thousand yards might become the battle range in future. One fact that came out prominently was that the only way to enable the officers of a ship to judge the range of the enemy, and to ascertain if they were making good practice, was to fire salvoes, and not single isolated shots. The reason for this is not difficult to understand, even by those without technical knowledge. If a salvo, say of four shells, is fired, the shots will not fall at the same spot, because during flight they scattered slightly; some drop a little sooner than the others; they are, in fact, "strung out." If all the splashes are seen to be on the *near* side of the target, evidently the range has been underestimated. If, on the other hand, the

splashes are all on the *far* side of the target, the range has been overestimated. When some are seen to fall beyond, while others fall short, then the target must be in the centre of the salvo, and the exact range has been obtained. No other means of ranging the guns could be suggested except this method of salvo firing. Obviously, if this method were to be used, a ship should be provided with several large guns of the same calibre, so as to provide a bunch of shots for ranging purposes. It was clearly shown that it was hopeless to make use of guns of different calibres for this purpose. Important differences in the flight of different calibre projectiles were found to creep in during the time that the shells were in the air. In order, therefore, that the knowledge gained by the trials might be fully utilized, it was evident that our future battleships should be armed primarily with a sufficiency of guns of one uniform size.

The question of the policy involved in this increase of the battle range had also to be considered. That a longer battle range was desirable was undoubted, for the torpedo was increasing in range, and bidding fair to become almost the determining factor in a battleship action. Line of battle was the only really sound formation in which to fight the guns to the best advantage, and this was fast becoming impossible from the threat of the torpedo.

For this reason alone some change of policy had to be made, and the main points that Fisher had to decide were :

(1) Was it wise to adopt the longest battle range that was feasible ?

(2) If so, should ships be built with this range in view ?

(3) What size of gun should consequently be adopted for the armament of our large ships?

Had it not been for the threat of the torpedo, and the probability that some foreign country might arrive at the same conclusions as ourselves regarding long-range hitting, and build ships for use at battle ranges greater than 5,000 yards, it would have been better not to build the *Dreadnought*. But Fisher had to take these facts and possibilities into consideration. The question reduced itself to this, "Should he build the type of ship best suited for fighting under ascertained modern conditions, or should he continue to build ships that were known to be unequal to existing requirements?" The First Sea Lord, as the trustee of our national security, could give but one answer to this question.

Let us assume that Germany had, by a line of argument and by experiment similar to our own, evolved the design of a battleship of uniform calibre gun armament. There was no reason why she should not have done so. Further, let it be assumed that she had kept her purpose secret, which was a much more simple thing to achieve in a disciplined country like Germany than in Great Britain.[1] Four years afterwards "Dreadnought" types would suddenly have appeared in her Fleet, and if she had declared war we should have had only ships like the *Lord Nelson* to pit against them. The battle would have been fought at 10,000 yards range, with our ships only able to fight, more or less inefficiently, at 6,000 or 7,000 yards range. At the subsequent inquiry it would have come out in evidence

[1] As a matter of fact, the German Admiralty did preserve secrecy for some months when, subsequently, their building programme was accelerated.

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that we had, knowingly and deliberately, built to an obsolete and second-rate type. What would the country then have said ?

The 12-inch armament of the *Dreadnought* was *imposed* on Fisher, and he had no option but to adopt it. To him must, however, be given the credit for translating the results of current experiments into policy, and foreseeing the immense importance of the issues at stake.

A tragic fact about the storm that raged round the " Dreadnought " design was that the country could not be told the whole truth, and the hollowness of the adverse criticism exposed. The Admiralty were most careful not to say anything which would in any way divulge the knowledge that had been gained in our long-range shooting trials, although it was on these that the whole design was based. Aged Admirals who knew nothing of the elements of long-range shooting, and many zealous, but ignorant, civilians, joined in the hue and cry. Looking back now at the names of the foremost of these critics, it is a sad thing to note the impulse that actuated each in his opposition ; fortunately, in most cases ignorance was probably the most prevalent.

The gun that was eventually chosen for the main armament of the *Dreadnought* was of 12-inch calibre, for the simple reason that this was the largest gun then in existence. To have decided on a smaller gun would have been to countenance a reduction of power at a time when other countries were installing 12-inch guns in the turrets of their battleships. Fisher, moreover, was a believer in the heavy blow being the knock-out blow. There was yet another reason for choosing the heaviest gun that it was practicable to

manufacture; this was, briefly, that the heavier the projectile fired with a given velocity, the more accurate was the shooting at all ranges. This point will again be referred to later,[1] when the policy of introducing the 13·5-inch gun is discussed; in the meantime it must be accepted as an ascertained fact.

The main considerations that inevitably pointed to the adoption of the "Dreadnought" type therefore were:

(1) The torpedo menace necessitated longer ranges in action.
(2) Long-range hitting had become practicable.
(3) The only method known of ranging at long ranges was by firing salvoes.
(4) This necessitated a uniform armament of eight or more guns.
(5) The heaviest gun gave the greatest blow, and was the most accurate at long ranges.

Each one of Fisher's advisory officers agreed with regard to the 12-inch gun for the battleship armament, but a difference of opinion developed concerning the armament of the "Invincible" class of cruiser. Both types were being designed at the same time, both came under discussion among Fisher's "devils," and there was much controversy about the battle-cruiser armament. Fisher kept an open mind until the real issue became quite clearly defined.

The *Invincible* had a totally different genesis from the *Dreadnought*. She was designed in order to meet a want that had long been felt but never supplied, namely, a ship fast enough to hunt down any armed merchant ship afloat, and at the same time to be able to fight any cruiser afloat. The word "fight" with Fisher meant "to crush." With him there was no question of designing a cruiser *equal* in strength or

[1] See Volume II, page 82.

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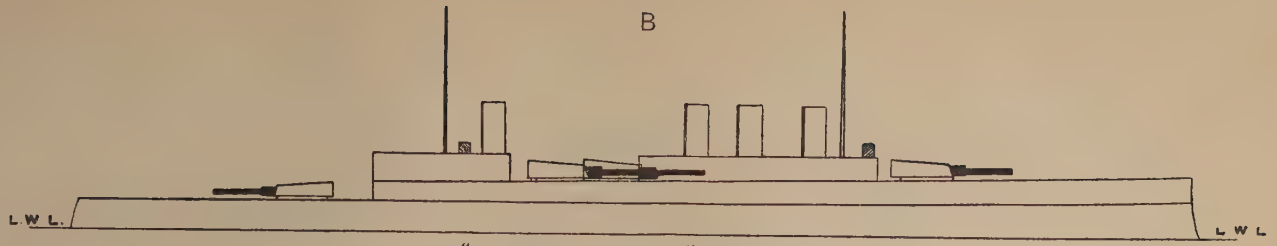
speed to that of the enemy; for then the result of an action might be uncertain. His contention was that we should be superior to the enemy in numbers, in guns, in hitting power, in speed, and in personnel; and then, and then only, could the people of this country sleep peacefully in their beds.

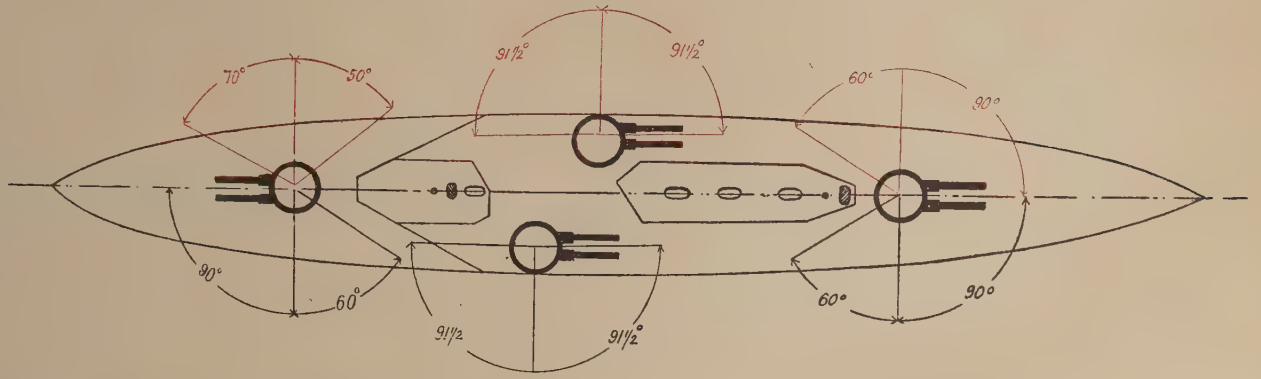
The speed of the *Invincible* was definitely fixed at 25 knots. This gave her some margin over the German Transatlantic liners. Hitherto we had subsidized, for a huge annual sum, some of our own liners to fight those of Germany, in spite of the fact that they had never been designed to fight and were totally unfitted to do so. For weeks, however, discussion continued about the armament of the *Invincible* 9·2-inch versus 12-inch; but in the end the 12-inch gun won on the unanswerable plea that ships, of the size and tonnage necessary in order to build an *Invincible*, should have an additional use in being able to form a fast light squadron to supplement the battleships in action, and worry the ships in the van or rear of the enemy's line. They were never intended to *engage battleships single-handed*; but they were designed to assist in a general action by engaging some of the enemy's ships which were already fighting our battleships. The arguments germane to long-range hitting applied equally to the battle-cruisers, but instead of five turrets, weight and space for four turrets only were available.

The difficulty then arose, how to get so drastic a change in design adopted. *Athanasius* was indeed *contra mundum*, for the *mundum* included the Admiralty, the Treasury, and all the conservative elements in the Navy, as well as the "Bath-chair Harriers," as a correspondent wittily described the retired Admirals and other aged officers. Here Fisher's extraordinary fore-



"INDOMITABLE" DESIGN

PLAN.



sight and shrewdness came in. He instituted a Design Committee. The constitution of the Committee was such as to give to any design that met with its approval an authority that would be beyond reasonable cavil. The Committee was appointed on the 22nd December, 1904, and included:

Naval Officers

Rear-Admiral H.S.H. Prince Louis of Battenberg, Director of Naval Intelligence.

Engineer Rear-Admiral Sir John Durston, Engineer-in-Chief of the Fleet.

Rear-Admiral Alfred L. Winsloe, Commanding Torpedo and Submarine Flotillas.

Captain Henry B. Jackson, F.R.S., about to assume the office of Controller of the Navy.

Captain John R. Jellicoe, about to assume the office of Director of Naval Ordnance.

Captain Reginald H. S. Bacon, Naval Assistant to the First Sea Lord.

Captain Charles E. Madden, about to assume the office of Naval Assistant to the Controller of the Navy.

Civilian Members

Philip Watts, Esq., LL.D., D.Sc., F.R.S., Director of Naval Construction.

The Right Hon. the Lord Kelvin.

Professor J. H. Biles, LL.D., Glasgow University.

Sir John Thornycroft, F.R.S., D.C.L.

Alexander Gracie, Esq. (Fairfield Shipbuilding Company).

R. E. Froude, Esq., F.R.S., Superintendent of Admiralty Experimental Works at Haslar.

W. H. Gard, Esq., Chief Constructor of Portsmouth Dockyard.

It will be observed that modern naval thought was adequately represented. The Engineer-in-Chief and the Director of Naval Construction represented Admiralty design and construction. Mr. Froude was *facile princeps* in knowledge of the design of hull shape.

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Sir John Thornycroft shared with Mr. Yarrow[1] the most expert knowledge of high-speed destroyer design. Mr. Gard had been associated with the "Dreadnought" design at Portsmouth; and the greatest of all, Lord Kelvin, though not a ship designer, was the leading practical physicist of the age. The terms of reference to the Committee were short but comprehensive:

1. The Board of Admiralty have decided on the leading features of five types of vessels, and wish the Committee to assist the Board with their advice upon each type.

2. It must be clearly understood that it is no part of the function or purpose of the Committee to relieve the Director of Naval Construction of his official responsibility.

3. The Committee is to consider itself an advisory body of great value to the Board of Admiralty, in consequence of the large and varied experience of its members, whose association with the Board of Admiralty in the consideration of new types of vessels, containing so many novel features, will lend great weight to the decisions arrived at.

4. The distinctive characteristics of these five types which are to be considered by the Committee are enumerated in the accompanying statement.

INSTRUCTIONS TO BE OBSERVED IN CONSIDERING THE FEATURES WHICH SHOULD BE INCORPORATED BY THE DIRECTOR OF NAVAL CONSTRUCTION IN THE NEW DESIGNS OF SHIPS.

I. *Battleship*

Speed, 21 knots.

Armament, 12-inch guns and anti-torpedo-craft guns. Nothing between. 12-inch guns to be as numerous as possible.

No guns on main deck, except anti-torpedo-craft guns if necessary to place them there.

Armour to be adequate.

Docking facilities to be carefully observed.

The battleship must be capable of using the ample docking accommodation at Portsmouth, Devonport, Malta, and Gibraltar, but the design will not be condemned, for the sole reason that the ship cannot be docked at Chatham or pass through the lock there.

[1] Now Sir Alfred Yarrow, Bart.

II. *Armoured Cruisers*

Speed, 25 knots.

Armament, 12-inch guns and anti-torpedo-craft guns. Nothing between. 12-inch guns to be as numerous only as is consistent with the above speed and reasonable proportions.

Armour to be on similar scale to "Minotaur" class.

Docking facilities to be carefully observed.

III. *Torpedo Craft*

Destroyers to be divided into two classes:

(i) Ocean-going.

(ii) Coastal service.

The former to aim at a speed of 33 knots at war load in average weather and be about 600 tons; the latter to aim at a speed of 26 knots and not to exceed 250 tons.

In addition, an experimental large ocean-going destroyer to be designed which will achieve 36 knots at war load in average weather.

Fisher was not a member of the Committee, but he acted as Chairman. The Committee met for the first time on 3rd January, 1905, at the Admiralty.

After several meetings the general arrangement of the engines, guns, armour, speed, and internal features were settled for the battle-cruiser and destroyers.

Many dispositions of armament for the ships were reviewed, and some of these are shown on Plates at pages 248 and 256. That marked "A," for the battleships, and that marked "B," for the cruisers, were finally accepted.

The principles involved in the choice of the disposition of the turrets were:

Freedom of one turret from the blast of the guns of another.

Maximum ahead and broadside fire.

Superimposed turrets were not adopted because of the possibility of a single shell incapacitating both turrets.

The anti-torpedo armament was to be 12-pdr. guns,

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which was considered heavy enough at the ranges at which torpedoes could then be fired from torpedo craft in action. The principles underlying the use of the gun in action were for the first time considered in design.

The other points considered were :

A very high freeboard of 28 feet forward for steaming against a head sea.

Armour, maximum 11 inches.

Underwater protection against torpedoes and mines. This was the first time such protection had been included in ship design.

All main bulkheads were intact below the waterline, and no doors were fitted in them.

Accommodation for officers was fitted forward instead of aft, so as to be nearer the bridge. A telephone exchange was introduced.

The greatest of all the improvements, however, after the armament, was the introduction of turbine machinery for the main engines of the ship.

The procedure adopted by Fisher when building to the new design was again an example of his foresight and clear vision. It must be appreciated that a single invention *may* place the whole battle fleet of a Navy out of date, and this is what had actually taken place in 1905. It was the advent of long-range shooting, and not the *Dreadnought* herself, which made all existing battleships obsolete. It is true that all countries were in the same position ; but since every country, as soon as they heard of the new type of design, could make a fresh start, and build new ships to a " Dreadnought " design, the situation for our own Navy was a serious one. We would be starting on even terms with all other countries. The problem Fisher had to solve was, how to obtain a substantial

start, and then maintain an adequate superiority in ships over every other country.

Secrecy and speed were the essentials of the moment, and Fisher's policy was crafty and well laid. It may briefly be stated as:

(1) To complete all ships that were then (January 1905) building. It was at first considered that there was just a possibility of altering the design of the two latest of these, the *Lord Nelson* and the *Agamemnon*. But when their state of progress was reviewed, it was found that so much work had already been done on them that it was impracticable to make any alteration in armament that would be of real utility.

(2) The *Dreadnought* was to be laid down at the earliest date possible, and to be completed in *one year*, and then tried out as soon as possible so as to gain experience on which the design of the main "Dreadnought" Fleet would be based.

(3) No new battleships were to be started until the trials of the *Dreadnought* were completed.

The time required to manufacture the barbettes and gun machinery is the main factor that governs the time of construction of a ship; so that in order that the *Dreadnought* might be completed in twelve months, the turrets of other ships then building were commandeered. But even so, the task of building and equipping a ship in so short a time was herculean, and no man but Fisher could ever have attempted to carry it through. The design of the ship and machinery had first to be prepared, and this was bound to occupy several months. After the designs were ready, there came the vast work of the construction of the hull of a vessel of 18,000 tons, and the manufacture and installation of the turbine machinery of three times

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greater power than any that had previously been fitted. Fisher had always been unique in the way that he made other men work for him; he was a leader rather than a driver. He knew instinctively the way to get the best out of each subordinate and spur him on to further endeavours; every sort of blandishment and skilful flattery were called into play when required, and, as always was the case, he was successful.

Portsmouth Dockyard performed a feat which has never been equalled. The late Sir Thomas Mitchell, and those under him, deserve the greatest credit for the rapidity with which the ship was constructed. The following details are worthy of record:

The first keel plate was laid on 2nd October, 1905.

Launched, 10th February, 1906, that is, 18 weeks from laying down.

Went to sea for her trials on 3rd October, 1906.

These were completed in half the time allotted to them.

Sailed for her long cruise to the Mediterranean, Trinidad, and back, 5th January, 1907.

The Plates facing pages 264, 268, and 272 are of considerable interest, since they show the extraordinary speed of construction as photographed on certain dates. The first shows views two days after the keel had been laid; the second, five days after laying the keel; and the third, thirty-six days.

In no way was Fisher's real greatness as technical head of the Navy better shown than by the pluck and determination with which he adhered, through every doubt and difficulty, to the introduction of turbines for the main propelling machinery of the Navy. He appreciated to the full the enormous advantage of the turbine, namely, that of having a shaft, revolving evenly under a steady pressure applied always in one direction only, compared with the uneven drive of

the reciprocating engines which were then in use in the ships of the Royal Navy and also in the Mercantile Marine. In this latter class of machinery, moving parts of many tons in weight are threshed up and down more than 180 times a minute. These parts during their motion actually attain a velocity of some 30 feet a second, which velocity is again destroyed 180 times a minute.

When steaming at full speed in a man-of-war fitted with reciprocating engines, the engine-room was always a glorified snipe-marsh: water lay on the floor-plates and was splashed about everywhere; the officers often were clad in oilskins to avoid being wetted to the skin. The water was necessary to keep the bearings cool. Further, the noise was deafening; so much so that telephones were useless and even voice-pipes were of doubtful value. In the *Dreadnought*, when steaming at full speed, it was only possible to tell that the engines were working, and not stopped, by looking at certain gauges. The whole engine-room was as clean and dry as if the ship was lying at anchor, and not the faintest hum could be heard.

Needless to say, there was considerable opposition to the introduction of the new type of machinery. No turbines of more than 7,500 h.p. (those of the *Viper*) had been tried in the Navy. The *Amethyst* was being fitted with turbines of 14,000 h.p.; but she was not quite completed at the time that the Design Committee met; and, soon afterwards, during a preliminary steam trial, it was discovered that the cover of her main turbine, a very large and heavy casting, was cracked. Stories passed round of the turbine blades being stripped, and being ladled out of

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the engine room by the bucketful! All these rumours and doubts reached the Committee; but Fisher had complete confidence in the advice of Sir John Durston and Sir Charles Parsons and stuck to the turbine; in consequence, he achieved, with these ships, the greatest individual success that naval construction has ever seen.

Fisher knew that no Fleet then at sea in the world could be relied on to steam for eight hours at full speed without one or more ships breaking down. One of his greatest preoccupations in the Mediterranean had been to work up the effective speed of his Fleet; he had succeeded up to a speed of 14 knots, but no higher. He knew that this was due to defects inherent in reciprocating machinery.

When Prince Louis of Battenberg carried out a most instructive trial with his Cruiser Squadron of six ships, by steaming from New York to Gibraltar in November 1905, only the *Drake*, *Berwick*, and *Cumberland* got across at 18½ knots, consuming all their coal supply in so doing, and requiring extensive minor repairs to their engines afterwards.

A similar trial was made in the French Navy. The *Amiral Aube* was the only one of three cruisers to come through successfully; the *Condé* and the *Marseillaise* had to undergo repairs, and their services were lost to the Fleet for some months. These failures hardened his resolve to try turbine machinery, with the result that the *Dreadnought*, a little over one year afterwards, although a battleship, steamed to Trinidad, more than double the distance from New York to Gibraltar, at 17½ knots; and after her return to England, at a similar speed, had no defect of any sort to her main engines. Moreover, queer to relate, the measurements taken of her main bearings, after her

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H.M.S. *DREADNOUGHT* TWO DAYS AFTER HER KEEL HAD BEEN LAID

I. 264 Nearly all the lower tier of frames have been placed in position and partly riveted

return, showed a slight *negative* wear. This could only be explained by the difficulty of measuring accurately to such fine limits as were attempted. In reality, there had been no measurable wear of any sort.

It is impossible now for any seaman who knew the Navy in the last decade of last century to imagine what the war would have been without turbine machinery. The change was magical, and affected the whole situation. Ships could be relied on to keep to programme, whereas, before, nothing but uncertainty reigned.

There are one or two points of interest regarding the trials of the *Dreadnought* which have never been made public, but which are worth recording. How Fisher's enemies would have rejoiced had they known of them at the time! What alarmist rumours they would have spread, and what mud would have been flung at the ship and her originator!

When doing her full-speed trial it was discovered that the central one of the three main shafts was developing, for some unknown cause, exactly double the horse-power which it had been designed to stand. The Captain ran four runs on the measured mile in order to obtain the exact speed; and ended the trial after one hour, instead of four hours. This he did because the defect was not inherent to the type of ship, and could easily be corrected in future design; but he did not wish to risk a breakdown, and so delay the trying out of the *type*, with the consequent outcry that would be raised against the whole design. He also discovered that, if the ship was given more than ten degrees of helm when going over fifteen knots, the steering engine was not powerful enough to bring the rudder central again; the ship therefore continued to turn in a circle until her speed had fallen below fifteen

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knots. This he kept secret from the Admiralty; since, had they known this officially, they would not have dared to send the ship on her trial cruise. The Captain, however, could, by local orders on board, deal with the matter, and no accident occurred; although the ship chose the Straits of Bonifacio in which to execute a series of improvised circles.

Again, on the return voyage from Trinidad, when there was only just sufficient coal on board comfortably to steam the distance, the ship, mysteriously, one morning was found to be going one knot slower than she should have been steaming. This continued for two days, after which the ship picked up her speed again. It was found, after docking, that the plating had stripped off the rudder. When this had been torn partially off, it had acted as a drogue and checked the ship's way. The ship arrived at Spithead with only sufficient coal for another three hours' steaming — a close fit after a passage of seven thousand miles. All these were matters that could be put right in a new design, and merely justified the lengthy trial to which the *Dreadnought* was subjected.

Trinidad was chosen on account of there being a landlocked harbour of many square miles in area; so that every sort of trial, both of steaming and firing, could be carried out in reasonably smooth water. The month spent there was continuously devoted to work, and at the end a report was forwarded to the Admiralty which consisted of several hundred pages. This not only dealt with the *Dreadnought* herself, but with the development of the type, pointing out where improvements could be introduced and existing arrangements modified.

Fisher most wisely had arranged for Lieutenant

F. C. Dreyer, the most accomplished gunnery Lieutenant of that time, to be appointed to the ship for the cruise; he was of the greatest assistance in carrying out the gunnery trials.

The chief alterations introduced into subsequent types of "Dreadnoughts" were mainly those which it was impossible to introduce into the original ship.

The major gun armament progressed from the 12-inch, through the 13½-inch, to the 15-inch, as progress in manufacture made the construction of these possible.

The anti-torpedo armament grew to 4-inch and then 6-inch. The principle of having one class of main armament only was adhered to; but as the size of destroyers became greater, and when it became apparent that light cruisers might be used in torpedo attack, the size of the anti-torpedo gun grew in proportion. When the *Dreadnought* was designed, the 3-inch 12-pdr. was considered large enough; by the time Jutland was fought, 6-inch was the recognized calibre.

Fisher in his later years viewed this rise in size of the secondary armament with suspicion; but it must be remembered that towards the end of his life he had not before him either the experimental data furnished by the experience of the Fleet or the considered opinions of up-to-date Officers to guide his judgment.

We have previously pointed out that the turrets that were in course of construction for two other ships were commandeered for the *Dreadnought*. This to a certain extent cramped design. The question of superimposed turrets was considered by the Design Committee, but it was impossible to adopt these owing to the time that was necessary for their design and manufacture. Moreover, it was felt that before such a design could be adopted, the possibility of a single

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shell putting the turret of three guns, instead of one of only two guns, out of action required full investigation.

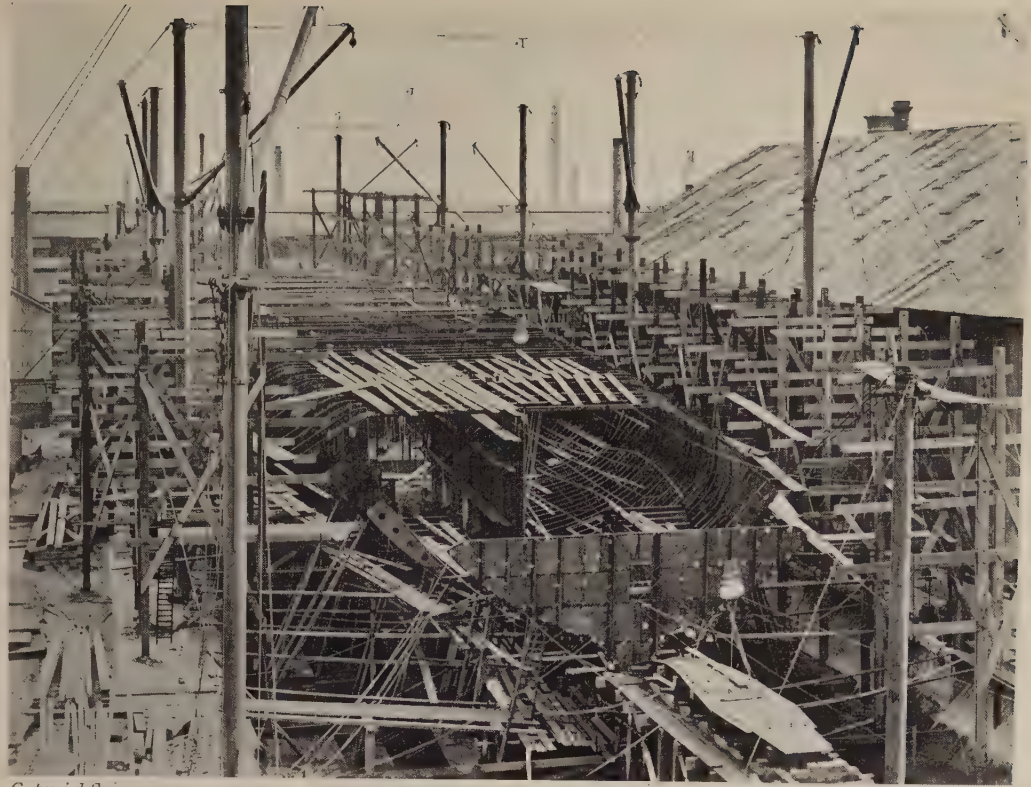
The armour belt was raised in subsequent ships. This was an important innovation. The belt of the *Dreadnought* was undoubtedly too near to the waterline.

The accommodation of the officers had been moved forward in the *Dreadnought* so as to bring them nearer to the navigating bridge. This was abandoned in later designs, and the old time-honoured system reverted to. The men on board the *Dreadnought* never believed that the above was the true reason for the officers being shifted forward ; they firmly believed that it was done because it was feared that with turbine machinery (which to the seamen sounded like some new form of magic) the vibration would prove too much for the comfort of the officers, so the ship's company were put aft to endure it ! The British seaman is ever a suspicious person ; not improbably it is the centuries of life which that race has passed as an under-dog that have given him good reason for being suspicious.

The result of Fisher's " building strategy " is clearly shown by the following figures. On the 1st November, 1909, the numbers of Dreadnoughts and super-Dreadnoughts, battleships and cruisers, building or authorized to be built by the different countries, were :

—	Built.		Building.		Total.	
	B.S.[1]	A.C.[1]	B.S.	A.C.	B.S.	A.C.
England . . .	4	3	11	2	15	5
Germany . . .	2	0	8	3	10	3
United States . .	2	0	6	0	8	0
France. . . .	0	0	0	0	0	0
Japan	0	1	2	1	2	2
Russia	0	0	4	0	4	0
Italy	0	0	4	0	4	0
Austria . . .	0	0	0	0	0	0

[1] B.S. = Battleships ; A.C. = Armoured Cruisers.



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H.M.S. *DREADNOUGHT* FIVE DAYS AFTER HER KEEL HAD BEEN LAID

1. 268 The beams for the armoured deck partly in position

Building programmes will be touched upon again later, but the lead gained by England during this early period is most marked. But for Fisher's astuteness we might have started the race level, and continued it on even terms with foreign countries.

In 1909 Germany had not a single "Invincible" class of armoured cruiser completed. The reason for this is interesting. Although we had laid down three cruisers of this class in 1905, the advent of the *Dreadnought* took all attention away from them, and it was not until we actually had our first *Invincible* completed and in commission, that Germany realized that we had been building cruisers superior to any which she could send abroad. It was not until 1910 that the first German "Dreadnought" cruiser was put into commission.

The ordinary citizen has probably never realized what a risk was being incurred in the years 1905–8. It can now be appreciated that the "Dreadnought" class became inevitable as the direct outcome of modern gunnery experience, and that Fisher so guided our policy in those fateful years that in 1909 the change had been made and we still had the necessary preponderance in both "Dreadnoughts" and "Dreadnought" cruisers.

CHAPTER XI

MAJOR REFORMS

All that is human must retrograde if it does not advance.
EDWARD GIBBON.

The old Navy—Difficulties of manning the ships—Improvements prior to 1904—Fisher's education in the needs of the Navy—Fashoda and the Peace Conference—His major reforms—His peculiar style of having his documents printed—Nucleus crews—Special Service ships—Scrapping useless ships—Clamour raised—The three classes of useless ships—Lord Cawdor's review—Redistribution of the Fleet—Cuba, Zanzibar, and Jamaica—Lord George Hamilton's views—Two-year commissions.

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1854

WHEN Fisher entered the Navy in 1854, the personnel of the Fleet was of much the same standard as in Nelson's time. Sails were still the main form of propulsion, steam being regarded as rather an unreliable auxiliary, as was very clearly enunciated as late as 1862 in the preface to Nares's *Seamanship*, then the standard work for instruction in the Navy :

Engines and machinery are liable to many accidents, may fail at any moment, and there is no greater fallacy than to suppose that ships can be navigated on long voyages without masts and sails, or safely commanded by officers who have not a sound knowledge of seamanship.

Gunnery had advanced but little, the fighting range was about 1,000 yards, electricity was in its infancy, and torpedoes were not dreamed of ; hence higher education was unnecessary and, in fact, was practically non-existent.

The food was exactly of the same quality as that

served out in the *Victory*. The ships were still three-decked or two-decked line-of-battleships, frigates, corvettes, sloops, and gunboats. The accommodation for the men had not altered. The bedding was still kept in the hammocks, and the hammocks, by day, were stowed in lockers along the top of the ship's bulwarks, covered only by a painted tarpaulin to keep the rain and sea from soaking them through. Water was still a precious commodity and served out sparingly. A midshipman, for example, had two pints a day, and an extra pint when he dined with the Captain. Rain-water was caught for washing clothes. Water was lavishly served out only after a watering party at some port had filled the ship's tanks up to the brim.

At this time, when a ship's commission came to an end and she was paid off, everyone belonging to her below the rank of warrant officer, that is, the midshipmen, naval cadets, and other persons of similar rank, and all the seamen ratings if not continuous-service men, were liable to be paid off out of the Navy; but in order to prevent the discharge of the midshipmen, cadets, masters' assistants, etc., from the Service, they were appointed to the guardship at one of the three principal home ports. Those who were newly entered were sent to the *Victory* at Portsmouth, which was the ship that Fisher joined. As an example of the shortage of men during the Russian War, we find in July 1854 the Commander of the *Calcutta*, Frederick Hildebrand Stevens, with 200 men of her complement, turned over to the *Royal William*, the regular flagship of the Admiral-Superintendent, which was sent to the Baltic for Russian prisoners; and the retransfer was not made until September. It was not until the fol-

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lowing year that the *Calcutta* was able to complete her crew and proceed to the Baltic.

A ship that was not actually in commission was a mere hulk, without masts or stores or anything of any kind on board, every item of her equipment being ashore in the Dockyard. As soon, therefore, as the Captain received his appointment, he went to the port and proceeded on board the hulk which was lying out in the stream, and, as the ship had no masts, he hoisted his pennant on a boathook, or something of the kind, and then read his commission, probably to the ship-keepers, who alone might be on board. The next stage was to raise a ship's company. Some of the officers were sent to various naval and mercantile ports, where they took lodgings at a public-house, called it a rendezvous, hoisted the Union Jack, and put up placards pointing to the advantages of the ship and station, lauding the Captain, and offering service for a period of so many years, generally three or five, with a discharge at the end of the time, or extra pay if kept on. The operation of collecting a crew was seldom completed under several weeks, and sometimes took months. The motley nature of this human material was such that, with only a handful of prime seamen and a few trained men from the gunnery ship, it took again many weeks to pull the crew into shape. Many of the men thus entered were new to the Navy; some were not seamen at all, and were entered with the rating of landsmen. Sir John Dalrymple Hay mentions the fact of the *Minden* visiting the Shetland Islands and entering over 200 of the islanders, who could neither speak nor understand English. Even the merchant seamen who enlisted were unaccustomed to men-of-war routine and discipline.

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H.M.S. *DREADNOUGHT* THIRTY-SIX DAYS AFTER HER KEEL HAD BEEN LAID

The plating of the armoured deck nearly completed, and the main deck beams well forward

Until, therefore, a sufficient number of useful men had been raised, the task of fitting out, even with the help of Marines who joined from barracks, proceeded very slowly. At the time of the Russian War there was neither the attraction of a bounty, nor the coercion of a press-gang to simplify the operation. The impress service had ceased with the Treaty of Vienna in 1815; and although it was still legal to summon all the seafaring population for the defence of the realm, this Act was not put into force. The task of collecting a crew was sometimes easier if other vessels had recently paid off, special inducements being offered to men who re-enlisted within a specified time. Some relief, too, might have been expected from the recently introduced continuous-service system, which dated from the Order in Council of 1st April, 1853; but owing to the large number of vessels to be put in commission, the 7,000 men who nominally had been entered on this system went a very small way. Lord Clarence Paget, who commissioned the *Princess Royal* 91-gunship at Portsmouth, says in his recollections that there was a scarcity, almost an absence, of seamen:

> By dint of handbills and touting of all sorts we managed to enter at an average of 20 or 30 per week. Scarcely any of these had been in a man-of-war, and consequently they were entirely ignorant of the management of great guns and muskets. Eventually we completed with 200 coastguardsmen, but many of these were worn-out and useless folk.

Mr. H. N. Sulivan says that his father, Sir Bartholomew J. Sulivan, told him that the deficiency of seamen in his ship was made up by shipping cabmen and others who had never been to sea before. The *Calcutta*, which Fisher joined, was no exception to

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the rule; and Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge relates how in November, *six months after she was commissioned*, he saw the ship still at Falmouth endeavouring to complete her complement of seamen; while there is a note in the *Naval Gazette* of 17th December, 1854: "*Calcutta* came up from Falmouth, having entered very few hands."

The newly-appointed officers and the raised men had to provide, ship, and stow everything needed. No guns, stores, or provisions were on board; the boats had to be drawn from the Dockyard, and the masts hoisted in, stepped, and rigged. Before a ship sailed, the men were given three months' advance, and sometimes their friends, male and female, were permitted to visit them on these occasions; if they managed to smuggle liquor on board, a regular orgy took place.

It was not until 1860 that there was any general codification of law and punishment, and the Articles of War were still very much the same as at the beginning of the century. In general, the usage or custom of the sea was recognized as a proper guide in all matters for which no hard-and-fast rule was prescribed. It is noteworthy that although the first Article of War prescribes the performance of public worship according to the Liturgy of the Church of England in every ship, as well as the observance of the Lord's Day, Sir Dalrymple Hay, in his recollections, says that daily prayers were not at all usual in the Navy at the time when he introduced them in the *Wolverine* in 1847; nor was it until some thirteen years later that this daily observance was especially ordered by the Admiralty.

In essential points, the differences in the regulations

in 1854 from those of the early nineteenth century were much smaller than might have been expected, seeing that there had been nearly forty years of peace. Flogging was still fairly frequent ; and unauthorized punishments, some of which would now be considered brutal, were often awarded. Fisher himself has mentioned that in the *Victory* in 1854 he had to walk up and down the break of the poop with a coil of rope round his neck, by order of the Commander, who had satisfied himself that the boy would one day be hanged !

Such were the conditions at the time of Fisher's entry in 1854. Between then and 1904 many changes took place. The education of both officers and men had improved considerably, and the *Britannia* had been allotted as a training-ship for naval cadets, who passed through a two-years course on board before going to sea. The special branches of gunnery and torpedo, with courses for both officers and men, had been formed. Discipline had improved greatly. The " cat " had been abolished, punishments codified, and the granting of extended leave had stopped much drunkenness and leave-breaking. Uniforms had been standardized, and official patterns were rigidly adhered to. Ships had passed from wood through iron to steel, with great improvements in the men's quarters. Hammocks were stowed below decks, where they kept dry. Fresh meat and vegetables were served out whenever the ships were in harbour, though salt rations were still issued at sea. Commissions, however, remained of uncertain length, not infrequently of four years', and sometimes even of five years', duration.

The manning of the Fleet had been improved ; and, thanks largely to Captain W. H. Hall, the First

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Director of Naval Intelligence, some system had been introduced into the methods of supplying crews in case of mobilization. In lieu of laying up ships "in ordinary," the name given to the old system of paying off and leaving vessels to rot with only caretakers on board, the advent of machinery had necessitated a care and maintenance party of stokers, engineer officers, and warrant officers; while men of all ratings were kept at the principal ports with a view to reasonable care being taken of the ships after they had been paid off. The Navy had distinctly improved in all respects, but progress had been slow up to the time that Fisher left the Mediterranean Fleet in 1902.

Undoubtedly Fisher's period of service in command of the North American Station had broadened his outlook, and turned his thoughts from the narrower view of the efficiency of the Navy to the much wider aspects of the safety of the Empire. The two may at first appear to be synonymous, but the efficiency of a Naval Service depends only on material and personnel, whereas the safety of the Empire further demands a sound naval strategy. It was to the strategy of the Navy, both in peace and war, that his attention became now directed. Admiral Mahan's epoch-making publications appeared about this time, and their teaching undoubtedly assisted to awaken in Fisher's mind a broader conception of the whole needs of our Naval Service.

The Fashoda incident brought him face to face with the possibilities of war. It showed him how suddenly a cloud might rise from a clear horizon, quickly spread, and break into a storm of hurricane force over the armed countries of Europe. Soon after this Fashoda crisis, which had filled his thoughts with

the possibilities of war, he was brought into close contact with the naval delegates of the other European maritime countries at The Hague Conference. No man knew better how to draw out the views of others in conversation, even though they might not be anxious to impart them. Subtle suggestion, combined with an inimitable innocence of features, was certain to lead to retort, and from retort, argument was sure to follow. From these conversations Fisher learnt a good deal, and for the first time he awakened to the fact that Germany might in time become a more serious menace to Great Britain than France.

It became apparent to him during the Conference that the ambition of Germany was first to rival, and then to outrival us at sea; these were to be her stepping-stones to the domination of Europe. The subjugation of France appeared to Germany to be a comparatively simple matter, one of purely military calculation; but the officers of the German General Staff were not proposing to repeat the mistake of Napoleon, and to leave Britain behind her sea protection, free to intrigue and to give financial help to any Power with which they might be at war, and so upset their prospective subjugation of Europe. They realized that Great Britain had first to be beaten at sea, and then the rest would be easy. He also learned that our downfall was to be effected primarily by means of the torpedo. Our battle-fleet was to be attacked by hordes of torpedo craft, and our command of the sea thereby, they hoped, successfully challenged.

When in command of the Mediterranean Fleet the possibility of war with France had been his main preoccupation. The German Emperor had not then increased his Navy sufficiently to be a serious menace

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to ours, while any *rapprochement* with France looked far from probable while she was still smarting under a sense of injury at the Fashoda settlement. His energies, therefore, were devoted to preparing the Fleet under his command for war with France; or with France and her ally Russia. During all manœuvres that were conducted on a large scale by him the torpedo was given a fair trial, and methods for combating it were devised.

But Fisher's mind even then travelled beyond the limits of his own immediate command, and his conviction that the Empire existed by virtue of the efficiency of the Navy continually grew stronger. In his evening walks on the ramparts of Valletta he surveyed the Navy from top to bottom. He viewed the great changes that had crept in during the previous thirty years, changes so subtle and of so gradual a growth that, to the average naval officer, they hardly seemed changes at all. Old conventions and shibboleths still remained, in spite of altered conditions, for ships had become machines and the old craft of the sailing-ship seaman had disappeared. Yet the young naval officer was still being educated in sailing lore and not in engineering. The gun was bursting its shell with greater accuracy at increasing ranges, yet our battle tactics were those of practically a hundred years before, and our ranges for fighting were far below those that were already possible. Our latest ships were the conception of theoretical designers rather than being practical fighting weapons. The conditions and treatment of the men had vastly improved, but in some ways crews were still housed and cared for in a barbarous manner. Improvements in social conditions ashore had not found adequate

reflection in the Navy. Long commissions abroad still obtained, under which men were often away from their homes for four years or more at a time, and possibly during twenty years of service might be twelve or fifteen years absent from their wives and families. The general peace strategy of the Admiralty seemed faulty; since dozens of ships which were useless for fighting were kept on the active list, consuming, for upkeep, a great deal of money that could be better spent in other ways. Many of these antiquities were in commission abroad; and, in the event of a serious world-wide war, would have to be paid off, both for their own safety and that of their crews.

In all kinds of weather, gales or calm, wet or fine, he walked up and down the ramparts close to Admiralty House, questioning officers, extracting their views, and thus learning the ideas that were seething in the brains of those of the younger men who, through the present, foresaw the future, and were not blinded by the past. His conviction grew that many matters must be changed before the Navy could be considered really efficient. His ideas soon began to take definite shape; and while fully recognizing the immensity of the task, the strenuous nature of the battle before him, and knowing well the abuse he would incur, he came to adopt as his slogan, "The efficiency of the Navy and its instant readiness for war." No other man in the Navy could have embarked on such an adventure. Nobody else had the imagination to foresee the necessity for the changes, nor the strength of character to set aside old customs and prejudices, to override established privilege, and to face without faltering the storm of abuse and obloquy that would surely burst upon him.

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Fisher cared nothing for the opinions that others might form of him, and he never sought power merely for his own exaltation, but solely because it enabled him to carry through the policy that he knew to be right. He would brook no opposition that stood between him and this objective ; he steered a straight course and charged and demolished all organized obstruction. To an officer who was faced by local obstruction he telegraphed, " Well done ! They may kick, but I can kick harder." He knew it was a useless waste of time to stop and parley or to compromise in cases where obstruction arose largely from self-interest ; for the time at his disposal to carry through the reforms was too short if the Navy was to be ready for the coming Armageddon.

The story of the intrigues against Fisher behind the scenes forms sorry reading. The whole truth cannot even now be published ; but the written record remains in damning evidence. When this becomes public in years to come, Fisher will rise higher still in the estimation of his fellow-countrymen, and the characters of the smaller and meaner of his detractors will correspondingly suffer.

The following letter, written six months before he went to the Admiralty, throws some light on his views as to the most effective way of introducing his reforms :

A dozen years' experience of the Admiralty and fifty in the Navy (with only three weeks unemployed !) has convinced me that for reform in the Navy to be effective it must not be previously ventilated. This is contrary to the practice and experience of you shore-going people ! The fact is from top to bottom of the Navy we are imbued with the most abject and servile respect for our seniors ! If I hung up my cocked hat and epaulettes outside the front door of Admiralty House it would cause an involuntary shudder in a salute from every officer and man who

passed by! Now remember, an Admiral is about the most self-satisfied type of being on earth! "Such and such a thing did not exist when he came to sea; then why the devil should it exist now?" "The Service has been going to the dogs" ever since he has known it (the real fact being that it gets better every day). "He'll be d——d if he will be a party to these new-fangled notions!" "Fight tooth and nail against them!"—that's his motto! All his juniors, saturated with the instinct of implicit obedience which has been imbibed as it were with their mother's milk, owing to their early age of entry into the Navy, and regarding an Admiral as infallible, either follow suit or are dumb! *But* if that mysterious and awful body the Board of Admiralty ("without a body to be kicked or a soul to be d——d") issues a ukase to say that "black is white" and "twice two makes five," Admirals and all (for the same reason) swallow it whole. They are involuntarily compelled to obedience to, and boundless faith in, that Mysterious Force (*point de culte sans mystère*) above them, so ubiquitous that, while regulating the length of a shoe-lace at Portsmouth, it castigates the Admiral of a distant Fleet (reminding one of the elephant's trunk, which as easily picks up a pin as tears up an oak tree by its roots).

And further, a reform thus introduced doesn't grow up, like your shore-going reforms, with such accretions and abstractions that its own father doesn't know it. No! It emerges like Minerva out of the head of Jupiter! full-grown, armed, ready for work at once, in its prime.

So if you go humbugging about and let any of those cats be seen in public which I had in the bag to show you, I shall be dished! Even the King and both Houses of Parliament are powerless to work any great reform in the Navy! You can agitate about it outside till you are black in the face; it's no use! The First Sea Lord is the only man in creation who can effect the reduction of the income tax to threepence in the pound! and you must let him alone to do it by himself! but you must hang on to him like grim death and shout like blazes, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," so as to give him the prestige to carry it through.

Of course he is going to prove to two of you (or three at the most) that he is absolute master of the situation; and you mustn't be shocked at his self-assertion! We are brought up to believe in ourselves! *If you don't believe in yourself, no one else will!* So I ask you to keep all to yourself; or, at the very most, disclose

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and discuss in the most secret way with the other two friends you named, but please don't ask me to be present or assist.

P.S.—I am so busy I had to write this very hurriedly. I will send you something better later, but this, at once, to prevent your letting those precious cats out of the bag! No such cats were ever seen by the Queen of Sheba.

Fisher will always be known, not only as the great reformer who reorganized our modern Navy and prepared it for the Great War, but also as the First Sea Lord who materially improved the condition of the men of the Fleet. He was the exponent of economy, he wanted every penny he could save to improve the material of the ships, but he never grudged spending large sums to redress any grievance the men might have that came under his notice. There had hitherto at the Admiralty been a distinct tendency to save money at the expense of the crews, by not bringing their standard of living to one comparable with that of their class ashore. Fisher took quite an opposite view, and did all in his power to make the men as comfortable as he reasonably could.

The following are the five major reforms he introduced:

(1) The new scheme of education of officers.

(2) The introduction of the "Dreadnought" type of battleship.

(3) The introduction of the nucleus-crew system of manning ships in reserve.

(4) The elimination of inefficient fighting ships.

(5) The redistribution of the Fleets, and limitation of the length of commissions.

The scheme of education for young officers, which has already been dealt with, was put before the First Lord, then Lord Selborne, while Fisher was still

Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, and was amplified and submitted to the Board of Admiralty when he became Second Sea Lord in 1902. The remainder of the schemes were inaugurated when he returned in 1904. The following print is a facsimile of two pages of the preamble to the general outline that he gave to Lord Selborne. It is interesting as showing how he tried to reproduce in print the emphasis, the shake of his fist, and generally his energetic style of conversation :

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MOTTOES

SOLVITUR AMBULANDO

EXPERIENTIA DOCET

Secret and Private.

Admiralty House, Portsmouth,
May 14, 1904.

ORGANISATION FOR WAR.

Note :—This was the Preface of the Paper given to Lord Selborne on the day the present First Sea Lord was nominated to succeed Lord Walter Kerr on the Board of Admiralty.

"IF THE TRUMPET GIVE AN UNCERTAIN SOUND, WHO SHALL PREPARE HIMSELF TO THE BATTLE?"

(*St. Paul,* 1 *Corinthians XIV.*, 8.)

The object of the following remarks is to make clear what has now to be done to organise and prepare for war.

What are the two great essentials ?

I. The Sufficiency of Strength and the Fighting Efficiency of the Fleet.

II. Absolute Instant Readiness for War.

To get these two essentials an immense deal is involved ! It is believed they can both be got with a great reduction in the Navy Estimates !

This reduction combined with an undeniable increase in the fighting efficiency of the Navy involves great changes and depends absolutely on one condition :—

The Scheme herein shadowed forth must be adopted as a whole !

Simply because all portions of it are absolutely essential—and it is all so interlaced that any tampering will be fatal !

The whole scheme could emerge next Christmas morning from the Board of Admiralty (as did the new scheme for the entry and training of officers and men) like Minerva from the Head of Jupiter—fully developed, full grown, complete, and armed like Minerva against all objectors ! *and this is possible !*

The country will acclaim it ! the income-tax payer will worship it ! the Navy will growl at it ! (they always do growl at first !)

But we shall be Thirty per cent. more fit to fight and we shall be ready for instant War !

And in time when we get rid of our redundancies in useless ships and unnecessary men it will probably be 30 per cent. cheaper !

The outline of the various proposals will first be given. *No one single point must be taken as more important than another. Each is part of a whole;* As St. Paul well observes in the XII. Chapter of the Corinthians :—

" The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee : nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary."

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A separate chapter has been devoted to the *Dreadnought*; there remain, however, the other three major reforms. These were to a great extent interdependent, namely, the redistribution of the Fleets, the provision of nucleus crews to man the ships in reserve, and the scrapping of useless ships. The reason for their interdependence was that men had to be found to supply the nucleus crews of the ships in reserve; and the only way these could be provided economically was by scrapping all the out-of-date and useless ships, paying off such as were in commission, and devoting their crews to this purpose. Again, the redistribution of the Fleet allowed ships to be withdrawn from stations where they were no longer required, and paid off. This, again, allowed for the strengthening of our Home Fleets; which in turn was assisted by the reserve ships having efficient crews.

A most important question at once arose, namely, whether our ships serving abroad were distributed in the way that best suited war requirements; and whether the new world-conditions that had come about since Trafalgar did not necessitate a complete reorganization of our accepted foreign stations and the ships allotted to them. Careful consideration showed that many changes were imperative; and the consequent reorganization of stations abroad again permitted of a saving of personnel. The cumulative effect of these changes was to provide the balance of men who were required to form the nucleus crews. At the same time the redistribution and weeding out rendered the foreign squadrons much more efficient as fighting units. With a comprehensive grasp of the needs of the Navy, Fisher thus devised this complete triply inter-connected scheme of nucleus crews, re-

distribution, and weeding out which so greatly increased the efficiency of the whole Fleet, both at home and abroad. It will be of interest to examine each of the constituent parts in detail.

Nucleus Crews

The system of care and maintenance of ships not in commission that was in existence in 1904 had been in vogue for some years ; and although a great improvement on that of twenty years earlier, it was far from efficient. Briefly, the ships were supervised by two organizations, called the Fleet Reserve and the Dockyard Reserve. The former dealt with the ships supposed to be immediately ready for sea ; and the latter with ships out of commission and undergoing lengthy refits.

The method of providing for the maintenance of the ships was crude. An Engineer officer, and a boatswain, gunner, and carpenter, were appointed to each ship in order to look after the stores. No permanent crew was kept in any ship, but working parties were sent from the depot ship to keep the ships clean, and the machinery and gun and torpedo gear, etc., oiled and worked. This organization ensured that the mechanical parts of the ship were kept in fairly efficient condition. On mobilization, crews were sent to each ship ; but since all the officers and men were new to the ship, some time elapsed before a state of even moderate efficiency was reached.

Gunnery was daily becoming more and more the business of experts ; and to obtain really efficient shooting, the officers and men had to be trained and exercised in their own ships. The principal Engineer

officers also required knowledge of the little failings of the engines of the ships, and intimate acquaintance with the officers and the chief ratings who would work under them. The Captain obviously required experience in the handling of the ship in company with the Fleet. Each class of ship has distinct peculiarities in manœuvring, in its gunnery details, and in its engines. Each ship of a class even differs somewhat from her sisters. Obviously, therefore, any officer or man who had served mainly in battleships would for some days be unfamiliar with his duties and his surroundings if on mobilization he were sent to a small cruiser.

Fisher judged all things by the crucial test of "instant readiness for war," and could not tolerate the imperfections of this system; for he knew that mobilization would in all probability be rapidly followed by actual war. He was determined that all the reserve ships should be made as nearly equal in efficiency to the ships in commission as was possible; he therefore introduced the system of keeping always on board each of the ships a "nucleus" of both the officers and men of her complement. The nucleus crew consisted of all the more important fighting ratings, gunlayers, sightsetters, engine-room ratings, etc.; in fact, all who had responsible duties, men for fighting and steaming; the manual workers were supplied on mobilization. There were, however, sufficient officers and men in the nucleus crew to take the ship to sea in an emergency and to *fight* her *for a short time* without drawing additional help from the depots.

The first line of reserve ships had their nucleus crews living always on board with the Captain, Gunnery and Torpedo Lieutenants, and other officers, including

a Medical and Accountant Officer. They were run exactly like fully commissioned ships, and were collected together at each of the three Home Ports—Portsmouth, Plymouth, and Sheerness. Each of these Divisions had a Rear-Admiral in charge, the whole being placed under the command of a Vice-Admiral designated "The Admiral in Command of the Home Fleet." The Reserve Fleet periodically went to sea under its own Admirals, and carried out gunnery and other practices to half the extent of ships in full commission. Hence this Reserve Fleet could efficiently reinforce the Active Fleet in home waters at short notice. The Reserve Fleet was never intended to be continuously at sea for more than one or two days unless the ships had previously been completed to full complements; but, nevertheless, the whole of the essential fighting units were on board, ready and practised, merely requiring the draft of manual workers to bring the whole organization up to a state of efficiency comparable with that of the fully commissioned ships.

It was, of course, impracticable to keep the reserve ships fully manned. There must always be, in peacetime, a number of men undergoing courses in the Gunnery, Torpedo, Signal Schools, etc., and in the Barracks, men just returned from foreign service or about to leave for ships on distant stations, and many more who are required for peace establishments and the subsidiary services of the Navy. All these become available on mobilization; but at other times the courses of training must continue without interruption.

In 1897 international complications had led to the hasty commissioning of a Special Service Squadron composed of two battleships, two first-class cruisers

and two second-class cruisers. This gesture achieved its object; but there was absolutely no doubt that the ships were not fit to go into action for some time after they had been commissioned. A considerable amount of good work had been done previously in arranging for a *general* mobilization of the Fleet, but no preparation had been made for only a *partial* mobilization; so that on this occasion great confusion resulted. Most of the men who had been detailed under the general mobilization scheme to man these ships were undergoing courses, and fresh crews had to be told off on the spur of the moment, with the result that mistakes and confusion occurred. An "emergency ship" system was devised in order to meet such a case in future.

It was, of course, impossible to forecast whether a squadron of battleships or of cruisers, or both, might be required at short notice; so, at each of the three ports, two battleships and two first-class cruisers with nucleus crews were selected as "emergency" ships, and crews were held ready to man completely any two of them; thus either six battleships, six cruisers, or any proportion of each up to six in all, were instantly available, should occasion arise, without disturbing the harbour schools.

Scrapping Obsolete Ships

When Fisher gave detailed consideration to the orders that should be issued when war became imminent, he was faced with the fact that there were in commission, as well as in reserve in the home ports, a considerable number of gunboats and other ships of small fighting power that could neither fight nor run away. The only rational action on the outbreak of

war was to pay such vessels off at once, and either distribute their crews among the other ships on the foreign station where they happened to be serving, or to send them home. The questions inevitably followed, whether these vessels were of any real service in peace-time, if they were useless in time of war ; and whether the peace work they were supposed to be doing could not be equally well carried out by ships that could fight. No doubt this was so in many cases, but again came a further question, was the peace work on which they were being employed necessary for the fighting efficiency of the Fleet ?

On some of the foreign stations small ships were kept mainly for the gratification of the various Consuls, who liked to have visits paid occasionally by a man-of-war to enhance the prestige of his country ; what was called " showing the flag." Occasional visits were undoubtedly necessary for such a purpose ; but Fisher insisted that they could better be paid by ships of fighting value, which could uphold the dignity of the white ensign ; and that our loss in prestige in war-time would be considerable if these dummies, which had previously been used to demonstrate the might of our Empire, had to be hurriedly paid off in order to prevent their destruction by the enemy.

Another class of ship, besides the gunboats, that fell under review was the second-class cruiser. A considerable number had been built under the Naval Defence Act of 1887, but had now become obsolete and useless for service with a Fleet. A hypothetical scouting incident was often used by Fisher to illustrate this.

Light cruiser *Venus* returns to the Fleet to report that she has sighted the enemy. The Admiral signals for her to give number

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and constitution of the enemy's Fleet. The answer is, "Regret I cannot inform you. I was driven off by the enemy's first-class cruisers, whose speed was much greater than mine, so I had to leave before I could get well in sight of the Fleet."—"What the something something is the good of you as a cruiser?" would be the Admiral's reply.

The third class of useless vessel was the rearmed battleship and armoured cruiser; these had had modern guns put on board, but their speed, coal capacity, and armoured protection were well below those of the battleship and cruiser of that period. A considerable number of ships had been treated in this way. These never really had much fighting value, and long-range shooting had rendered them hopelessly out of date.

Fisher firmly set his face against allowing money to be spent for any purpose that did not assist the fighting efficiency of the Fleet. There was no money for luxuries; the money available for the Navy was always strictly limited. He defined unproductive expenditure as "any expenditure that did not aid the fighting efficiency of the Fleet and its instant readiness for war." He was determined to rid the Navy of all inefficient vessels which were swallowing up and wasting money; but before the actual scrapping was decided on, a very careful scrutiny of every ship on the list was carried out. A Special Committee sat and went thoroughly into the matter from the point of view of present usefulness, probable utility in three years' time, and possible value for subsidiary non-fighting purposes in war. The fully efficient ships were first sorted out, and then the remainder were divided into three categories: (1) those that were past all use; (2) those which still had some present

use but would soon be of no further value, and (3) those worth keeping for fighting purposes. The three classes were familiarly known as the goats, the llamas, and the sheep. Ninety ships were condemned as useless for any naval purpose, and recommended for sale. Thirty-seven were marked as being useful for subsidiary purposes in war-time. A further 27 were considered to be of sufficient value to have their armament retained on board, but not worth the expenditure of further money for upkeep and repair. In this way 154 vessels were struck off the effective fighting list, and further expenditure on them stopped. The money spent on these 154 ships during the previous ten years had been over three and a half million pounds. The Committee submitted that in future the list of fighting ships should be reviewed annually, and that no money should be spent on ships when they were approaching obsolescence.

Lord Cawdor's explanatory statement to the Navy Estimates of 1906 gives in a clear manner the reasons for weeding out these obsolete ships :

> Now the last two years have given the Board an opportunity for reviewing the fighting efficiency of classes of vessels which has never before been afforded since modern fighting ships have been in existence. A great naval war [1] has given us a practical demonstration of the comparative values of the factors that go to constitute the different classes of ships. This has been entirely in accord with the more theoretical conclusions of peace-time ; but the evidence of war had added authority to those conclusions, and so invested them with the conviction that action, which previously might have been looked on as premature, could no longer be delayed from merely opportunist considerations. We live in a period when changes are far more rapid and far-reaching than has ever been the case before. The range of modern actions has, we may

[1] The Russo-Japanese War.

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almost say, jumped from 3,000 to 7,000 yards, and the sea-going speed of our cruisers has risen from 18 to 23 knots. This means that cruisers of previous types are placed at a hopeless disadvantage in their legitimate function of scouting, since anything that cannot force home a "reconnaissance" is of little use to collect information; and if to this is added the chance of such scouts being themselves captured or sunk, such vessels become an anxiety rather than an assistance. Reliability is the essential feature of all "intelligence scouting," and unreliability in the scout is almost as fatal as false information; therefore, beyond all things, scouts must be reliable. The primary features, therefore, of all scouts are either great speed or good speed and good armament.

Similarly with battleships. A battleship to be of real use must be strong enough to take her place in the line of battle. Her armament must be good, and her protection must be such as to withstand the enemy's fire at the range at which a modern action would be fought. If she does not possess these two qualifications, she is unfit to fight in the line of battle; if mixed with more modern ships, she denies them the tactical advantage which their better armament and speed confer on them in choosing the range for action, as well as the strategical advantage of the greater speed. Not only have all the above considerations to be weighed when considering the condemnation of older vessels from the fighting side, but the question of expenditure of money out of a limited vote must also be very seriously examined. Given unlimited money to be devoted to the maintenance and reconstruction of ships, and again unlimited money towards providing them with crews, no ship unless her bottom were eaten through would be condemned; but the moment scientific economy has to be studied, it is plain that it is often a great waste of money to keep out-of-date ships of bygone age on the mobilization list, and to provide them with thoroughly efficient crews.

One point of great moment is, that by keeping these older ships we do not in any way effect the question of reduction of new construction. The retention of twenty out-of-date "Orlando's" [old first-class cruisers] does not do away with the necessity for the construction of a single modern fast armoured cruiser. Vessels of the latest type are in any case required in sufficient numbers to enable them to give a good account of similar ships of the enemy, and no number of out-of-date "Orlando's" can do this. If, there-

fore, we retain all the older ships on the fighting list, we are faced by the question, what will be the increase of the Navy Estimates to provide the personnel? If the finances of the country cannot indefinitely stand a very large yearly increment, then either we must stop new construction and defend the Empire with ships of inferior fighting power, or we must cease to provide sufficient crews for them all. Thus the only rational procedure is to lay up out of the fighting line those ships whose value has seriously decreased.

To take an example of the importance of reviewing the classes of ships required for the Navy and the particular duties which they fulfil, it will be convenient to consider the case of the slow-speed gunboats removed from the fighting line last year, the smallest of which costs £12,000 a year for its upkeep.

Gunboats, and all vessels of like class, have been gradually losing value except for definite purposes under special conditions. As far as this country is concerned, the very places consecrated as the sphere of gunboat activity are those most remote from the covering aid of large ships. Strained relations may occur at the shortest notice; the false security of the period of drifting imperceptibly into actual hostilities is proverbial, and the nervous dread of taking action that might even be construed into mere precautionary measures of defence, which experience has shown to be one of the peculiar symptoms of such a period, is apt to deprive these small vessels of their last remaining chances of security by not allowing them to fall back towards material support.[1] The broadcast use of gunboats in peace-time is a marked strategic weakness, and larger vessels can generally do the work equally well, in fact far better, for they really possess the strength necessary to uphold the prestige of the flag they fly, whereas the gunboat is merely an abstract symbol of the power of the nation, not a concrete embodiment of it.

Distribution of the Fleet

The distribution of the Fleet in sailing-ship days took account more of the land than of the sea. Protection of our colonies was then the important matter,

[1] The sinking of the *Sphinx* in the Great War affords a good example of what Fisher feared would happen. This ship would never have been lost had he been at the Admiralty.

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and our foreign trade was largely confined to the Mediterranean, West and East Indies, and China. South American trade was small, and Australian still less. Japan was closed to Europeans till nearly the middle of last century. We had one strong Fleet in the Channel, and another in the Mediterranean. The East Indies was the next largest Fleet, for India was then our most valued colony. The next in importance was China, and then the Atlantic coast of North America, including the West Indies; then came the Cape of Good Hope, the Pacific and the south-east coast of South America. The atlas shows the necessity for this wide distribution, for sea passages in those days were at the mercy of the wind, and therefore of indeterminate lengths. A good passage to India from England took 90 days, a bad one might be 130 days or even more. With the advent of steam, and cable communications, the necessity for all these isolated units gradually diminished; and the strength of the squadrons nearer home became of greater importance as the armaments of other European Powers increased in quantity and in quality. But, in a conservative service, changes always lag behind the requirements of the times.

Fisher took the opportunity of his reorganization of the Fleet to effect a redistribution of our ships over the world generally, in order to meet the conditions of the day. This made our foreign squadrons more efficient and less vulnerable; while it permitted him to strengthen the Home Fleets without increasing the Navy Estimates.

All gunboats were withdrawn, except those necessary for river service in China and on the west coast of Africa. The ships stationed permanently on the

south-east coast of America were withdrawn, and this coast was visited annually by other ships. The Pacific Squadron was withdrawn, with the exception of a vessel to police the Behring Sea seal fishery. The China, Australia, and East India Squadrons were formed entirely of cruisers; and, although retained as separate commands, their respective Admirals or Commodores met periodically to discuss the problems of their respective stations and arrange for joint action in war. The redistribution nearer home was the direct outcome of the impending changes in the centre of gravity of naval armaments, caused by the advent of Germany as a rival in the naval arena. Great Britain was still in a position of splendid isolation; but this isolation was becoming an embarrassment, since the Navy had now to pay regard to Germany as well as to France and Russia. It became imperative to keep the strongest possible Fleet in the Channel; the Home Fleet, therefore, was increased to 14 battleships, with 6 armoured cruisers, and a proportion of smaller cruisers and destroyers; and renamed the "Channel Fleet."

The Mediterranean Fleet was fixed at 9 battleships, with 4 armoured cruisers, and smaller cruisers and destroyers; and a third Fleet was formed, which was based on Gibraltar, so as to act as a reinforcement either at Home or in the Mediterranean. This was named the "Atlantic Fleet," and was composed of 9 battleships, with 6 armoured cruisers and various smaller ships.

A new Cruiser Squadron was formed of 6 ships which was used for training purposes in peace-time. It was intended that this squadron should visit and show the flag at the West Indian ports and on the

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coasts of South America. In war-time it was to join either the Channel or Mediterranean Fleets, as might be necessary.

The new organization was designed to have a 10 per cent. superiority over the combination of either France and Russia, or of Germany and Russia, as shown below:

BATTLESHIPS

British Force.	France.	Germany.	Russia.	Germany and Russia.	France and Russia.
56	25	22	24	46	49

ARMOURED CRUISERS

45	19	7	7	14	26

Great economies had been effected by the abolition of unnecessary and obsolete ships on foreign stations; but, in addition, the withdrawal of these ships rendered several subsidiary dockyards needless; and here again money was saved. The naval bases at Halifax, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Ascension, and Esquimalt were abolished. At Ascension a sufficient force of Marines was maintained to man the guns, in order to prevent the anchorage being used by an enemy in war-time. The base at Trincomalee was closed. The bases on the China Station were expanded as circumstances required, and that at Gibraltar was enlarged, so as to cope with the refits of the Atlantic Fleet; for it was anticipated that, in war, Gibraltar would form a valuable repair base intermediate between England and Malta.

Emphasis has been laid on the financial aspects of

these great reforms. If the national purse had been of unlimited depth, the old system might have continued much longer. New expenditure was becoming essential in various directions in order to keep the Fleet up to the requisite standard of safety, and every year this sum was bound to increase. The Navy by this time became the target of the economists, inside the Cabinet as well as out. First the Treasury, then Parliament, then the public, all closely scrutinized the annual Estimates. Economy was necessary if money was to be available for Fisher's other reforms. It was recognized by him that most of the new expenditure would have to come from savings; and he also knew that his task would be one of difficulty and would involve much ill-feeling. Officers who had commanded on the various stations which he had decided to abolish viewed the changes with regret and dismay, for these suppressions seemed to imply that their labours in the past had been useless. Many officials were taken from comfortable shore billets and put into less congenial posts. Governors of Colonies joined in the clamour; Consuls were furious.

An earthquake in Jamaica and a mutiny of the military police at Zanzibar, both of which occurred at this time, gave definite points for attack. Immediately a clamour arose, the question was insistently asked, "Where are the ships, and why are they not available to stop the mutiny, and to supply first aid to the sufferers from the earthquake?" A section of the Press joined in the demonstration, and even the Foreign Office was induced to make a dignified protest to the Admiralty. Fisher knew he had done right, and that in time the clamour would die down, so he paid no attention. His views coincided with those of two

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writers in the daily Press, parts of whose articles are worth quoting :

If the highest German naval authorities are not incorrect, the Royal Navy is twice as strong to-day [1907] as it was after the Boer War, although the annual cost of the Fleet is now less than in 1905. In achieving this result, the Admiralty has not been goaded into reform by Parliament or public opinion. On the contrary, the conversion of the Navy into a machine ready for instant war to this day is resented by influential persons, who forget that when war comes we shall then all agree that the Navy should exist for war only.

The second correspondent summed up the whole matter in an amusing way :

On the 21st October, 1904, it was resolved that the venerable arrangements for the disposition of the Fleet then in force, which had lasted since 1812, should be brought up to date. The [old] arrangement pleased the Foreign Office and the Consuls' daughters, many of whom are extremely attractive girls who doted on the 1812 arrangement because, after all, there is no white male quite so agreeable as the British naval officer, whether he is a middy in his first commission or a retired Admiral, full of years and honours, who devotes a good deal of his life to attacks on the Admiralty. Though the old system of distribution was popular, there was one fatal mistake in it. For lawn tennis, waltzing, relief of distress, or ambulance work after an earthquake it was admirable ; for war purposes it was useless, because the force was divided and subdivided and was largely composed of ships that could neither fight an enemy nor escape him. The change was made on the principle that Germany, not earthquakes, was the objective ; that Teutonic, not seismic, disturbances were the business of the Navy.

According to some writers, the duty of the Royal Navy is to "prevent massacre in Jamaica." Consider what this means. Jamaica is not the only pebble on the Imperial beach, and any assumption of responsibility for order on shore at Jamaica is equally binding on the Fleet in every other port of the world. To discharge that responsibility would either add at least another 20 million pounds to the Navy Estimates, or would reduce the outlay on fitness for war by that amount. The nation cannot have

it both ways. Either the Navy exists for war or it does not. If it does, to talk about the Navy "preventing massacre" in Jamaica is sheer clap-trap. What is the War Office for? Fighting on land. What is the Navy for? Fighting at sea. Keep each of them to its own job and we may face the next naval war with composure; but to assign police or ambulance duties on land to the Admiralty is diverting it from the purpose for which it exists—war—to one which can only be accomplished by the sacrifice of war efficiency or by vastly increased Estimates.

To the suggestions that ships should have been at Chile and also at Cuba during disturbances, and at Zanzibar during the small mutiny of the police, Fisher replied:

In the case of Cuba the protection of British interests was very properly entrusted to the United States Navy, as we are at any time ready to protect theirs in any part of the world where our ships have to be present and theirs have not.

Cuba is almost a protectorate of the United States of America. Even if one of our ships had been present in Havana Harbour, it would have been very undesirable for her to land British bluejackets at a time when American intervention was in the balance.

Chile is a civilized country and should be required to protect other nationalities resident within its territory. The Admiralty must distinctly refuse to be responsible for the policing of Chile.

Zanzibar is a British protectorate, and the military and police arrangements should be such as to make serious disturbance almost impossible. In any case, the Admiralty cannot be expected to legislate for the totally unexpected.

Apart from the above, a good many of the individual applications for men-of-war deserve investigation, and it is worth while observing the *modus operandi* in these cases. Three typical ones have occurred recently:

(*a*) Lord Charles Beresford goes to Mexico on private business and sees the President. "In the course of conversation the Admiral mentioned that some British vessels were to visit American waters during the coming season, and the President signified with emphasis what satisfaction it would cause him were the vessels to pay a visit to Mexico."

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The British Minister therefore urges that a British squadron should visit Mexico, and the Foreign Office "hope that the Lords Commissioners may see their way to make arrangements for a visit."

Luckily, Admiral Inglefield [with his squadron] happens to be in West Indian waters, and, therefore, it is not necessary to send the First Cruiser Squadron to Vera Cruz; but no one except the Admiralty takes any account of the cost in coal and wear and tear of engines in the squadron steaming an extra 3,500 miles; nor, apparently, till Lord Charles suggests the idea, was any necessity seen for the visit.

(*b*) Some American millionaires get up a race for motor-boats, to finish at Nassau, in the Bahamas. With transatlantic vivacity they call this a "flag-to-flag race," and ask for a ship to look after the boats in case the weather is bad. The Governor of the Bahamas reports this to the Colonial Office, giving the impression that an international sporting event of some importance is contemplated, and the Colonial Office ask the Admiralty to send the *Indefatigable* from Jamaica. The Admiralty comply, and the *Indefatigable* arrives to find that the race has been abandoned, and that, in any case, she had never really been wanted.

(*c*) In 1906 Commodore Paget is ordered to the Falkland Islands at the request of the Colonial Office, not because he is wanted there, but presumably to compensate the 2,050 inhabitants of the group for the withdrawal of the South Atlantic Squadron which used to visit there.

Result: this year, when the *Brilliant* is ordered to Buenos Ayres, the Governor asks that she may be sent on to the Falklands (2,000 miles more) because Commodore Paget stayed there such a short time last year.

Lord George Hamilton, who for seven years was First Lord of the Admiralty, wrote to Fisher as follows:

During my term of office, Lord Salisbury, as Foreign Secretary, was frequently pressing for a wider and larger distribution of ships-of-war for diplomatic and other reasons; but this pressure was withstood by the Admiralty on the grounds that this peace distribution was extremely dangerous and undesirable, not only on grounds of resulting inefficiency following on the isolation of those

vessels and their absence from fleet exercises and war training, but their concentration on the verge of war would be difficult and often impracticable, because of precipitating the crisis when relations were strained, and when the slightest movement of ships-of-war would give rise to the idea of warlike purpose in so doing.

One of the greatest abuses in the Navy had been the length of time that some ships were kept in commission, which was a cause of much dissatisfaction to both officers and men. Three years was the usual term, but on some distant stations four years was frequent, and five years by no means unknown. Officers and men were therefore separated from their families for periods considerably longer than was necessary. One particular case well exemplifies this point. A Lieutenant was married, and within three months he went abroad for a five-year commission. He then returned, and after spending six months in England, again went abroad for another commission of over four years. Therefore for a period of nine years he spent only six months with his family. These long commissions were quite unnecessary, and were often occasioned merely by the desire of the Admiralty to avoid the expense of sending out a new crew in a mail steamer and bringing the old crew home in a similar way. It was usual, therefore, to wait until some warship was proceeding to the station, on board of which the relief crew could be crowded. The shortening of commissions to two years, however, involved a wastage by having a larger number of relief crews on passage to and from foreign stations, and therefore more men would be required to keep ships on the distant stations supplied with crews.

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Nobody was more human than Fisher, or more anxious to abolish just grievances. He himself had had experience of a long commission abroad, he had felt the pull of family ties, and he well appreciated the temptations and difficulties that beset the sailor and his family during those long absences; he therefore insisted, whatever the cost might be, on two years being adopted as the standard length of commission.

Such were the chief reforms instituted by Fisher, but, in addition, there were many minor ones which we must leave for another chapter.

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